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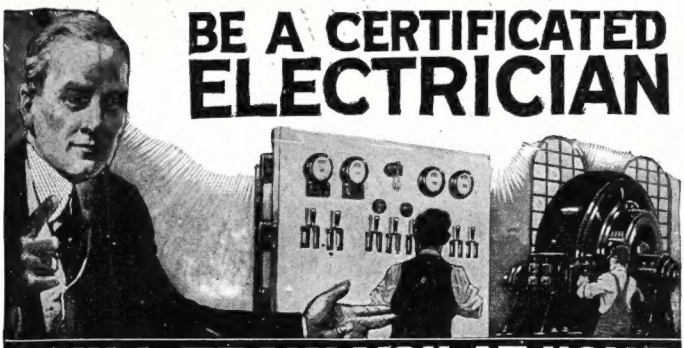

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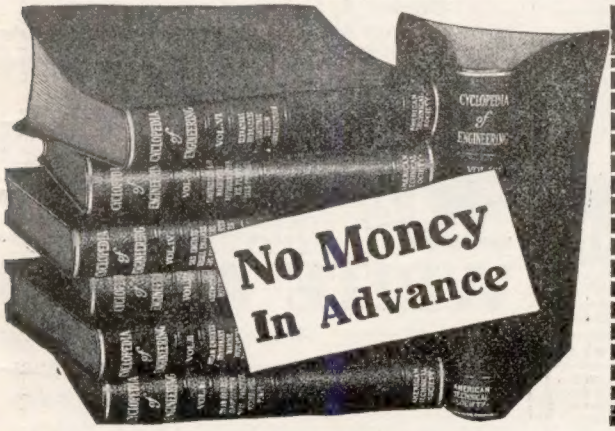

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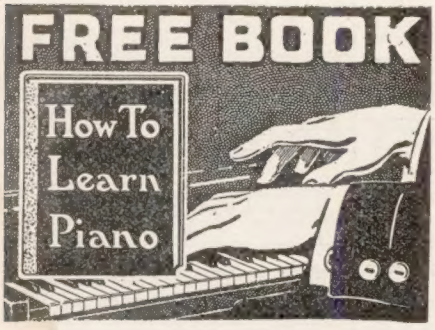

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LVIII. JANUARY 7, 1921. No. 6

Behind the Gray Wall

By Roman Doubleday

Author of "The Terrace Inn Tragedy," "The Green Tree Mystery," Etc.

The very name of New Orleans spells romance, and Mr. Doubleday takes us there in the midst of that carnival which doubles its lure—the season of Mardi gras. Amid the merrymaking, we are faced with sudden tragedy in the death of the blackguardly Maurice—whom Neal Dane hated with such good reason. Was the latter guilty? You won't know, any more than did Alice Cheney, Doctor Archer, Goff, or any of the others, until the very end.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

I BEG your pardon—but are you a physician?"

"Yes. Can I be of service?"

"My brother has fainted. If you could come with me——"

Doctor Archer's prompt answer was to pick up the traveling bag at his feet and to follow the girl without further question to the drawing-room at the rear end of the Pullman. At her first low-spoken word—even before he had glanced up at her from his magazine—he had known who was speaking to him. He had been curiously aware of her ever since she had come on board the train. There had been a young man with her, and an older woman who evidently had once been very pretty and still kept the manner of it. But it was the girl who attracted him, and not merely by her obvious beauty. There was something about her which hinted at an inner beauty. She was like a closed book which he wanted to read. He had covertly watched her whenever she walked through the car. He had deliberately waited at lunch time until he saw this party go out to the diner, and then had bribed the waiter for a place which gave him a face-to-face view of the tall, grave girl. He had known her voice would be like this.

He closed the door behind them as he followed her into the drawing-room suite, and dropped on his knee beside the unconscious young man who lay on the sofa. He was aware that the older woman he had noticed was in the room also, and that she was hardly able to control her distress and anxiety, but he did not take his eyes from the drawn young face that rested against a wet pillow case no whiter than itself. He had seen that look too often! He tried to find the boy's pulse, then ran his hand under his clothing to rest on the faintly beating heart. His fingers fumbled with a ring on a cord that got in his way—a small ring of twisted strands, set with three square-cut stones. His sensitive surgeon's fingers registered these details unconsciously. The ring spelled sentiment to his sympathetic understanding, though his conscious thought was wholly intent on his patient's condition.

"How long has he been unconscious?"

"I don't know—a few minutes before I called you." The girl was making an effort to speak steadily, but her voice quivered. "I tried to revive him with cold water."

"Is he subject to these attacks?"

"He has fainted twice in the past week, but both times he recovered almost immediately. This was—longer."

"Don't be alarmed," said Archer quietly. "There is no immediate danger."

He heard a breath of nervous relief from the older lady. "But can't you do something?—give him something?" she asked quavering.

"I think he is coming out of it now," Archer said, still testing with his delicate finger tips the wearied heartbeats which did not carry to the wrist. But after another minute's waiting he quietly opened his bag and took out a small hypodermic outfit.

"Will you help me, please?" he said to the girl. "Roll up his sleeve, while I prepare this."

He deftly filled the little syringe, cleaned the boy's bare arm with alcohol, and with a quick thrust sent the heart stimulant into the sluggish current in the veins. Almost at once he felt the heart flutteringly respond, and after a few minutes the tense muscles about the boyish mouth relaxed, the eyelids quivered, and a soft dew of perspiration appeared at the edge of the boy's dark hair. But at the same time he knew that the young man was far from being all right, even though he would soon recover from this faint. The doctor wondered if these women knew how serious the boy's condition was, or if he knew himself.

"You said that you had seen him faint before," he said to the girl. "Has he been under the care of a physician?"

"He has been in a hospital in Boston for several months. He was discharged only two weeks ago. We are taking this trip to give him a change of scene. At least, partly for that reason."

Privately, Archer thought that the discharge from the hospital had come too soon, but that opinion was not for publication. He watched closely as the young fellow opened his eyes, stared in growing surprise at the face of the stranger, and then made an effort to sit up.

"What the dickens happened?" he asked with a nervous energy not to be expected. "Did I keel over again?"

"Just for a minute, dear," the older woman answered as she put her hand tenderly on the boy's wet, dark hair. "You are all right now, aren't you, darling?"

"Good heavens, don't baby me, mother. It's bad enough for me to go fainting all over the place, like the heroine of an old English novel, without having you coddle me. What makes my head so wet? Alice, I believe you tried to drown me!"

"I'd hate to make so complete a failure of anything I really tried to do," the girl answered lightly. But her eyes were not as careless as her voice.

Doctor Archer let himself out of the room, with only a nod to the girl. He told himself that the family would prefer to be alone, but he was not oblivious of the fact that if he gave the girl no opportunity now to thank him for his help, she would be bound to come to him later, and that two interviews were twice as many as one. But it was his patient, and not the sister, who presently came out of the drawing-room, and hunted Archer up. He threw himself into the seat facing the doctor, with an ingratiating grin.

"You've made a reputation in there," he said, with a motion of his head toward the room he had left. "They think you're a wiz. Not that I want to contradict them! Much obliged, and all that sort of thing, you know."

"Glad I happened to be here," smiled Archer.

"It makes me furious to feel so shaky when I have nothing to show for it—no broken bones or honorable scars. You're ahead of me there, I see." His eyes rested with interest on a red scar running diagonally across three fingers of Archer's left hand.

"That? Pure accident," said Archer carelessly.

The boy grimaced. "Oh, of course. I didn't expect you to tell me. You doctors are all so blamed secretive."

That charge could not be laid against the boy—Neal Dane, he gave his name. At the end of half an hour he had explained himself pretty thoroughly. Archer was sufficiently responsive, for the boy attracted him, but he also had a physician's eye for this feverish eagerness to talk, and at last he deliberately broke the current.

"Let's go out to the observation car and take a look at things," he said, rising. "We must be getting down toward the tropics, by the look of these trees."

They made their way back to the lounge car and found chairs on the outside platform. The heavy Mississippi forest inclosed the track between green walls, made dense by great festoons of moss that linked the swamp-rooted trees. It was a scene strange to Northern eyes. Archer glanced from side to side with quick interest.

"This is new country to me," he said.

"I've never been South before. I wanted a bit of a lark before settling down to hard work again, so I decided to take in the Mardi gras at New Orleans."

"That's exactly what we are doing!" Dane exclaimed. "How jolly! We'll see more of you. Where are you going to stay?"

"I've made a reservation at the Monteleone. Everybody warned me that an advance reservation was necessary."

"Yes, I suppose the city is full up. We intend to stay in New Orleans for two or three months, and as Alice hates hotels we have taken a furnished house on Royal Street. That's in the old French quarter, you know. A friend of Alice's arranged the matter for us."

"Is Miss Dane a stranger to New Orleans, too?" Archer asked.

"Alice? No, she has been there before. Very much so! Only, she isn't Miss Dane. She is Miss Cheney, and my mother is Mrs. Cheney. You see, my mother married Alice's father when we two were both kiddies, and so we have grown up like brother and sister, hang it!" He frowned and grinned at the same time.

"Oho!" laughed Archer.

"It hasn't been such an all-fired joke for me," said Dane half resentfully. "I've been in love with Alice since I was eleven, and she first came to live with us. But what chance would there ever have been for a fellow that grew up in the house with her, and that she always thought of as her kid brother because her birthday came six months before his! I never had the ghost of a chance, I suppose, even if she hadn't met—the Other Man!"

"Oh, there is another man, is there?" Archer said slowly.

"Yes, she got engaged down here in New Orleans at the time when all the girls were tying up to the uniform. Business of the romantic Southerner, and all that. I've never seen him. Name's Maurice." He pronounced it in the French fashion. "He owns a plantation near New Orleans. That's one reason why we are to stay there, of course. I suppose he's all right, since Alice picked him out, but I can tell you one thing"—he faced Archer with a passionate intensity that wiped the boyishness from his face and for a moment made him look dangerous—"if he isn't good to her, I'll kill him."

"And I'll come and help you," Archer responded cheerfully. "But he will probably enjoy being good to her, without compulsion. I can't imagine any one who wouldn't, if he had the opportunity."

"Opportunity for what?" asked a girl's voice in the door just behind the two men.

"Opportunity to see the Mardi gras," said Dane promptly, jumping up and pulling another chair forward. "Good for you, Alice; come and sit with us. And let me introduce my old and intimate friend, Doctor Mark Archer. He is going to New Orleans, too, and I am counting on sobbing out my loneliness on his sympathetic bosom while you go gallivanting about with another!"

"I am sure his sympathy would be unfailing," said Alice Cheney, with a direct look into Archer's eyes which expressed her gratitude with an earnestness that words could not have matched. "I have already tested it."

She took the chair Dane had drawn up, and turned with a polite commonplace to Archer.

"Are you acquainted in New Orleans, Doctor Archer?"

"No. I have always understood that New Orleans in the Mardi-gras season was the one play spot of America. Don't they have masked balls and wonderful carnival parades and all that sort of thing?"

Miss Cheney shook her head in smiling regret. "The formal carnival features were dropped during the war, and have not yet been resumed, although there is a faint revival, in the form of one parade and a ball, given by a private club, this evening. We made a point of getting there to-day, on that account. I wish we might take you! You will see the street parade, at any event."

"I suppose the ball follows the parade?"

"Yes, at the famous old French Opera House. The affair is given for the débutantes of the season, and other honored girls, and to them it is all a delightful mystery—they are not supposed to know who their cavaliers are. Of course only members of the club are in costume, and masked. You might be able to get a card of admission to the theater as a spectator, but as a mere visitor you would not be allowed on the floor till after midnight, when the revelers unmask, and black coats are permitted to join in the dancing. I'm sorry!"

"So am I," said Archer, with emphasis, and a meaning look. "I was already building up a fairy castle that touched the skies, and I was waltzing through its interminable

halls with some one specially chosen for me by my good angel."

"Facts play the mischief with fairy castles," said Neal Dane emphatically. And Archer was piqued because Miss Cheney's smile of appreciation went to her brother instead of to him. Was her obliviousness intentional or natural? Under cover of the careless talk he studied her.

Alice Cheney was tall and delicately slender. Her hair was brown, but it was lighter than the American standard, and when the light struck it, it turned ashen instead of gold. Her eyes were unexpectedly dark—violet, Archer decided. It was their expression that fascinated him. Any one might read therein that her nature was gentle, compassionate, self-forgetful, but Archer thought that he read something more—or rather that there would be something more—to be read, if one had luck and opportunity. Something about the way her head was set on her graceful neck made him think of a flower—not a sturdy flower of the garden, and most certainly not a hothouse flower; but rather some tall, delicate flower from the heart of the woods, swaying to life forces so profound that of necessity, not of choice, they must seem secret in their influence.

The train slowed up as it approached a stop, and Miss Cheney rose.

"I'll go back and see if mother wants to go out on the platform for a minute," she said.

Archer would have been glad to go with her, but as Dane made no suggestion of escorting her, he felt constrained himself to refrain.

"What is this place?" he asked idly, surveying the town into which they had come. The scattered houses were weather-beaten and uncared for; abandoned gardens were given over to chickens and pigs; slouching white men leaned lazily against the walls of the station, and idle, smiling darkies were feasting their eyes on the splendors revealed through the coach windows.

"Don't know," said Dane. "Ramshackle place, wherever it is. Sounds like a dog fight out there. It *is* a dog fight! Come on!" With a boyish recklessness that laughed at caution, he jumped agilely over the iron guard that inclosed the open end of the observation car, and Archer followed.

There may be dog fights that deserve the chant of a Homer or a Doctor Brown in their celebration, but this particular conflict was less heroic than tragic. A bull was trying to tear a collie to pieces, and he had very nearly succeeded before the men who had thrown themselves upon the combatants were able to pull them apart. There were a number of men engaged in this task, but Archer's eye was caught by another man who was merely an onlooker, and, if the expression of his face did not do him an injustice, an amused onlooker. Dane looked back over his shoulder at the man when they had passed, as though he were more of a spectacle than the dogs.

"Did you see that man?" he demanded in frank astonishment.

"Yes."

"I wonder if he knows how he gave himself away. He's a brute at heart!"

"No beast of the wilds can match the human animal for brutality, when it comes to that," said Archer. They walked the length of the platform, and Archer glanced watchfully at his companion from time to time. He did not like Dane's nervous tension and unsteady breathing.

"There is something about cruelty to an animal that always gets my goat," Dane said at last, with a fineness of feeling to which his vocabulary did inadequate justice. "Did you ever happen to read what Lâfcadio Hearn said about his unforgivable sin?"

"No."

"He said he had done many things for which he was sorry and ashamed, but there was only one thing which he was afraid God would never forgive. He had once seen a man torturing a kitten, and he had not gone back and killed the man."

"I can understand his feeling," said Archer. "Come, we'd better be getting back."

But Dane was not to be so easily diverted. "Are all men savages under the skin?" he asked impetuously. "You must have seen a lot of things in hospital practice. What do you think?"

"Of course they are not. You are not conscious of any savage impulses in yourself, are you?"

"But I am! Seeing that man gloat over the dogs just now made me want to kill him. No red Indian could have felt more savage than I did for a moment. I simply hate cruelty with a—a *punishing* hatred."

"You don't often see deliberate cruelty. There is thoughtless cruelty, and ignorant cruelty, but——"

"That's what I used to think," the boy interrupted, with the cynical pessimism of youth. "I used to think that the white world was civilized. But there was a chap in the hospital with me, who had been a sailor, and one day he told me about sailing with a Captain Morris who owned a steam yacht. Is there something about the sea that brings out the latent cruelty in a man?"

"The captain of a ship has to have autocratic power, for use in emergencies, and few men can be trusted with autocratic power."

"Well, this man, who was a smooth, gentlemanly fellow——"

"Hello, it's time for us to get aboard, if we don't want to be left at this abandoned spot," said Archer. He knew he was evading the further discussion of the subject, and that evasiveness was in reality no way to bring peace to a distracted mind. But how could he discuss that tragic side of human nature with a man whose nerves were so obviously on a hair trigger?

They swung on to a forward coach as the warning whistle blew, and made their way slowly back the length of the train to the observation car, and there, as Dane had guessed, were his mother and Alice. Mrs. Cheney was watching the door anxiously for Neal. Alice Cheney, a faint flush on her cool cheek, was talking to a man whose back was toward them as they entered. When she saw Dane she raised her hand with a shy, beckoning gesture.

"Oh, here is my brother!" she said, with a catch in her voice. "Neal, this is Mr. Maurice. He came up to meet the train."

Her companion, who had risen, turned, and took a step toward Dane with outstretched hand. It was the man they had noticed watching the dog fight. "Delighted to meet you," he said, with a casual glance and a crisp carelessness that expressed indifference rather than delight. Dane nodded automatically, and muttered something that pobably passed as a greeting. He seemed oblivious of the other's hand.

"Doctor Archer—Mr. Maurice," Miss Cheney completed the introductions. But her eyes rested somewhat anxiously on her brother.

The two men bowed formally. Then the stranger turned with a flattering smile to Miss Cheney.

"I love the way you pronounce my name," he said. "People are so apt to make it Morris. They even spell it that way half the time. When I sailed my own yacht a few years ago, the official papers were made out to me as Captain Morris!"

Over Maurice's shoulder, Archer's eye flashed to Dane. The young man's face was as white as when he had first seen it against a wet pillow case in the little drawing-room.

CHAPTER II.

Archer parted from the Cheney party in the New Orleans station, when Maurice carried his guests off to a waiting limousine. While his interest in the members of that party had deepened, he was not sorry to get away from them for a time. He could hardly express to Dane his sympathetic understanding of the emotion that racked the young man, yet it was difficult to ignore it. He himself felt annoyed, almost angry, at the idea that Miss Cheney should be engaged to Maurice.

After the first moment of white dismay, Dane had accepted Maurice with all necessary civility, but Archer, with his physician's eye, and Mrs. Cheney, with her mother's intuition, knew that he had been profoundly disturbed. Maurice himself had not appeared to notice any lack. He had devoted himself to Alice with an absorption which perhaps excused his almost rude obliviousness of every one else, even of Mrs. Cheney. Archer divined that Alice was somewhat restive under this pointed attention, but Maurice was not a man to consider any wishes except his own. He was a handsome man—the "romantic Southerner" Dane had imagined. His lips were too thin and his eyelids too heavy, yet these defects seemed merely to add individuality to his countenance.

A taxicab took Archer to the Monteleone, and there he encountered the first incident in the curious chain of circumstances which marked that night.

"I am Doctor Mark Archer," he said to the clerk. "You have a room reserved for me? I wrote from New York."

"Yes, we got your letter, Doctor Archer, but I was rather hoping there would be a train wreck, or something, that would delay you until to-morrow."

"Thanks for your kind wishes. What's the matter?"

"Plumbing is the matter. A pipe broke on the floor above, an hour ago, and deluged your room with water. Also brought down

a part of the ceiling. We'll have it habitable by midnight——"

"Can't you give me another room?"

"My dear sir! We are making up beds on the billiard tables now. But we'll be ready for you by midnight, I assure you."

For an hour Archer idled through the streets of the old French quarter, more like a European city than anything he had seen elsewhere in America. He was interested in the shuttered houses, the narrow, cobbled streets, the strips of sidewalk which he had not yet learned to call "banquettes." He chanced upon Antoine's, and, knowing that to dine at that famous old restaurant was a ceremony no visitor to New Orleans could omit, he supped there, though it was yet early. From a street vender he bought a descriptive announcement of the carnival parade which would be seen on Canal Street at eight o'clock. He could not better fill in the interval of waiting than by resuming his explorations, so he turned up the narrow street of Toulouse, dark and suggestive of mystery.

Here he came upon a quaint and old-fashioned hotel whose swinging sign proclaimed it the Condé House. He wondered if even this obscure place was filled to the brim, and on an impulse he decided to go in and see if he could get a room. He felt that his room at the Monteleone would very likely not be ready for him by midnight, suave clerk to the contrary notwithstanding.

The tiny office opening to the left of the front hall was presided over by a compact, black-eyed young woman, who wore a hat, and was busily engaged putting some papers away in a cabinet behind her desk. She paid no attention to Archer until he spoke.

"Have you a vacant room, madam?"

"No. The house is full." She lifted the hinged flap of the counter which had shut her in, and stepped out into the hall. She had not even glanced at him. But her place in the office had been taken by a small old lady in neat black, who entered from the rear. She looked Archer over with quick eyes of intelligence, and then stepped after the girl into the hall.

"Marie! There is the front room," she said in eager French. "Why not let him have it for this night?"

"How many times, my mother, must I say that I will not let the captain's room go to any one?"

"But the captain will not come, that you know well, and should we throw away gold with both hands in these condemned times?"

"No one shall have the captain's room. It is enough," the girl said with an incisive bitterness that did not seem warranted by the surface appearance of things. She went on out to the street. The mother looked after her resentfully. "These American children!" she muttered to herself as she returned to the office.

Archer had listened with amused understanding. The mother had pleased him and he had not liked the girl's manner. It was more with a wish to sustain the old lady in her unequal contest with her "American" daughter than from any special desire for the room that he remained to press the point.

"If you have a front room which has not been claimed, madam, perhaps you could let me have it for one night."

"You have reason!" cried the old lady eagerly. "Why should I let the money run through my fingers while I wait for the captain? The best room in the house! Bah, he will not come. I know well. And am I nothing? It is not Marie who pays the taxes!"

"May I see the room?"

She led the way upstairs with a palpitating eagerness. It was like a child grasping at something forbidden. Evidently the sharp-mannered Marie's thumb was powerful, but not unresented. The room proved more attractive than Archer had dared to hope from the exterior of the house. It was immaculately clean, and though the furnishings were cheap the room itself held the atmosphere of an older and more stately age.

"I should like it very much," said Archer.

"For to-night. Only for to-night," the landlady said, lifting a warning forefinger.

"You think the captain may come and claim it to-morrow?"

She shrugged her shoulders expressively. "I think he will never come again. He has another sweetheart. One knows what men are. But, for to-night, Marie goes to my sister, who is ill. She cannot say anything. In the morning she returns—and you are departed!"

"All right," laughed Archer, with understanding. "I'll take the room for to-night. How much is it?"

He counted the amount she named into her hand and she gave him the key. Then she left him, with beaming wishes for his

rest. She had not suggested that he should register, or even asked his name. Probably she had no intention of letting the redoubtable Marie ever know that the captain's room had, after all, been rented!

Archer was glad to freshen himself up after his journey, and though he had left his bags at the Monteleone, he was able to make a satisfactory toilet. If the other room was not ready by midnight, he could spend a night here very comfortably. He was complimenting himself upon his foresight when he heard voices in the hall outside his door. One was unmistakably that of his landlady, and it sounded agitated.

"Non, non, monsieur le capitaine! It is not in order, your customary room! Unhappily! But this room—the door adjoining—it shall be vacated for your use."

"What matter? Any room will serve for a dressing room," a man's voice said impatiently. "That's all we want it for. Shut the door."

By the sounds it was evident that two men had entered the adjoining room—also that one of them stumbled. There was a door connecting the two rooms, but it was locked, as Archer had already ascertained, and the key was on his side. The two voices came through the thin partition, however, with disconcerting clearness.

"I believe you are too drunk to stand on the float," the same speaker said. He had a cultivated voice, but now it plainly expressed disgust.

"I—am—*not*—drunk," was the answer, given with a thick deliberation that contradicted the words. And Archer lifted his head alertly, for though he had heard that voice for the first time a few hours before, he recognized it at once for Maurice's.

"Well, then, listen—and put that damned bottle away," the other said impatiently. "Here's your costume. See, it is simple. Put this on over your clothes, and cover your head with this. And you are to be at the corner of Delta and Notre Dame exactly at a quarter before eight. The float is there waiting for us. We start at eight, and we can't wait for you. And if you are not steady on your feet, you'll fall off the float and break your neck. Now, do you understand where you are to go?"

"Yes—'course I do!"

"I wonder if it's safe to leave you!"

"You are mistaken, Alan, if you think—I'm—drunk. Nowhere near—drunk. Just celebratin'. Got a right. Damn pretty girl, Alan."

There was the sound of water splashing in a basin, more muttered admonitions which Archer avoided hearing, and then the door slammed. The man called Alan was evidently taking his departure. Maurice stumbled unsteadily against the furniture, cursed softly to himself, and then the bed creaked as though he had thrown himself heavily down upon it. Silence followed.

There is no denying that Archer was almost painfully interested in the situation. This was an additional side light on Maurice's character. The threat of a phohibition law which hung over the land had not yet gone into effect, but Archer felt that if Maurice was so easily affected by liquor, he should at least have had the decency to let the stuff alone on the day of his fiancée's arrival. How had that dainty, tender-hearted girl ever become entangled with such a man? Dane had hinted at the glamour of the uniform. She had been young, impulsive, ignorant—the engagement must have taken place two or three years ago—she probably had not seen him since. Archer's desire to understand and to think well of Alice Cheney had put him near to the truth.

A glance at his watch told him that it was half past seven, and he knew that he should be on his way if he wanted to secure a good place to see the parade, but he was held by his curiosity as to whether Maurice was going to get off in time or not. He stood by the window, unconsciously listening for a sound from the adjoining room and more consciously watching the stream of people flowing toward Canal Street. Suddenly, to his surprise, he caught sight of Dane hurrying along with the crowd. At the same moment Dane looked up and saw him at the window. The boy lifted his hand in laughing salute, but did not stop.

Archer turned from the window, but still he lingered, waiting for some sound that would tell him Maurice was on his way. What he heard was a heavy breath almost like a snore. Archer had no special interest in helping Maurice, but he did feel that it would be a pity to have the float incomplete. He was a man accustomed to assuming responsibility and making quick decisions. He quietly turned the key and entered the adjoining room.

Maurice was lying on his back on the bed, and breathing heavily. He may have been

half drunk when his friend left him—he was now sunk in a stupor and beyond all possibility of rescue. Archer looked down at him with eyes that took in his condition with professional understanding, and then he glanced at the crimson velvet cloak, plumed cap, and mask, which lay beside him on the bed. There was no possibility that this log of a man could wear those gay trappings this evening, or dance with Alice Cheney at the masked ball.

A spirit of boyish recklessness, to which he had given no indulgence for many burdened years, took possession of Archer. Here was a chance to be a part of the gay frolic of the night, to have a place on the float, possibly even to go on to the masked ball and dance with Alice Cheney! He took the costume back to his own room. It was the simplest thing in the world to put it on over his own clothes. He would be able to return it before Maurice woke from his stupor. He locked the two doors of his room and went downstairs without seeing any one. A waiting taxicab stood at the door and he took possession of it, giving the direction he had heard Maurice's friend give him.

"Corner of Delta and Notre Dame!"

He had no intention of personating Maurice. He thought it probable that he would be accepted as a substitute, since he had the costume, and the lack of one of the characters on a picture float could hardly fail to be a serious matter. And for himself, it would be the lark of his life. Under his mask he grinned to himself. He wondered whether his unconsulted supporters on the float would permit him to go through with the game to the end, or whether they would insist on his leaving before the ball.

But he had neither time nor opportunity to lay the question before any one. He was already late for the appointment. It was past eight when his cab whirled up to the corner he had named. An immense float, drawn by four horses driven abreast, was moving slowly up toward Canal Street when he arrived. It looked like the circus vans of his childhood. He had no time to consider its structure or meaning, but he did see that it carried three men costumed like himself, one at each of three corners of the lofty throne which filled the center of the float. The fourth corner was unguarded. That was evidently his place.

"Hi, Maurice, come along!" some one shouted above the rumble.

He sprinted after the slow-moving car, caught hold of a projecting ornament, and swung himself up. The same man shouted something further to him, but beyond gathering that it was a profane objurgation at his tardiness he could not hear what he said. Certainly there was no opportunity to explain who he was, or how he came to be where Maurice was supposed to be. It was all he could do to hold fast to his precarious perch as the car swung into Canal Street and fell into its place in the stately parade.

It was a wonderful spectacle. Canal Street, as wide as Fifth Avenue, was filled from edge to edge with eager humanity, and waves of applause and laughter rippled along as Archer's float made its lumbering progress. Evidently it caught the public approval. From his corner behind the throne he could not very well make out what the pageant, of which he formed a small part, was intended to represent, but when the foremost float in the parade reached the west end of Canal and turned to return down the north side of the open space reserved between the watching multitudes, he realized that he was taking part in an imposing affair.

Before each float, four negroes, cloaked to the heel, carried flaming torches, while four more walked beside the caparisoned horses that dragged the load. There was something exotic and tropical in the rhythmical swing of the darkies that added a final touch to the barbaric splendor of the scene. Archer knew, vaguely, that each float was designed by an artist, that it represented months of serious work, and that the velvets were so real, and the flashing jewels so nearly real, that no poor young man need ever apply for a part in any Mardi-gras pageant. Yet it was the flaring torches, and the slouching shuffle of the negroes, that made the picture complete. There was no play acting here. To them it was reality.

Archer realized that he was grinning to himself all the way, and he made an effort to behave in a more sophisticated fashion. But the spirit of foolery, which was the dominant spirit of the pageant, had entered into him. He rejoiced in his mask. He waved his hand to the crowd, and adjusted the ample folds of his crimson velvet cloak with a rollicking sense that, after all, crimson velvet was the only wear.

The long parade up and down Canal Street

was finished, and the float swung into the narrow confines of Bourbon on its way to the French Opera House. Archer sighed involuntarily as he realized that the fun was over, and that now the moment of explanation was at hand.

The float turned into the alley beside the opera house and a plank was thrust out from a window to make a bridge for the quick entry of the mummers behind the scenes. Archer was the last to cross, and he found himself behind the stage of the long-famous building.

He found himself in a crowd much too busy to pay any attention to him. Some of the mummers had dropped their masks to their wrists and were hurrying to help the stage force in the hasty arrangement of scenes. Others, who evidently had no part in the dramatic presentment which was going forward, were standing back, out of the way of the workers. Among these Archer naturally took his place. No one paid any attention to him. Gradually it dawned upon him that it would be much easier to stay and take part in the ball—and dance with Alice Cheney!—than to get himself thrown out. He laughed under his breath, and dismissed his last compunction.

The tableaux which the Mystick Krewe was presenting evidently had not included Maurice, as no one came to look him up. But the series concluded with a grand march of the entire Krewe about the stage, and here Archer found himself a place in the line. As the line circled the stage, past the section of the parquet reserved for the dames and damsels specially honored by the Krewe, Archer looked eagerly over the parterre of beauty in search of Alice. His eye found her almost at once—the sweet gravity of her look set her apart from the laughing, vivacious crowd about her. And suddenly he was passionately glad he had not found an opportunity to make his explanation and disappear.

The ball began immediately after the grand march. Following the method which he observed to be in vogue, he gave Miss Cheney's name to an usher, who went down into the reserved section and "paged" Miss Cheney until Alice rose in her place, to be escorted to the stage and to Archer. He swung her into the dance, and for some moments neither spoke. Then some instinct must have warned Alice that this was not the cavalier she had expected.

"Leon?" she murmured, half in doubt.

He did not attempt to draw her closer, but bent till his lips were near her ear.

"No, not Leon," he whispered. He remembered reading somewhere that the identity of a voice is lost in a whisper, and he had no wish that she should ever identify him. "Not Leon. Another who loves you!"

Her foot faltered, but he would not let her stop. His arm held her strongly and swung her on with the music. So far as emotion may be expressed in a whisper, his words were filled with tender laughter as he added: "There are many who love you, Sweet Alice!"

"Who are you?" she asked, looking intently into the eyes which were all that his mask revealed.

"Ben Bolt—of course!" he answered.

She let him guide her half around the stage before she spoke again.

"Where is Leon?" she asked.

"He is lying, dead drunk, across the bed in his room in the Condé House," he answered quietly.

This time she would have thrust him from her but for the fact that he drew her so closely against his breast that she could not free her hand.

"I am offering you a priceless jewel—the truth," he said in a swift whisper. "Do not push it away. You intend to marry that man. Is it not better that you should know the truth about him? He had an appointment to meet you here—you expected that his arm would be about you this minute. Yet he could so far forget you and himself as to drink himself into a stupor the first hour that you were here."

"I don't believe you," she declared. There was no lack of indignation in her voice, but Archer felt that in spite of her quick response there was doubt behind it.

"Why should I lie to you?"

"I don't know. Why do you?"

"I am telling you the truth because I think you have a right to know it, and no one of your friends would dare to come to you with it. I should probably try to soften it, if I were not speaking behind a mask. That's how our polite conventions hamper us. But you have a right to the full truth."

"How do you know?" she asked.

"I saw him."

She was silent a moment, and then she said wistfully, "I have no right to ask that he should be perfect. I am not."

Archer smothered a groan. Her humility made her seem to him infinitely dearer than perfection could have been, and the idea of turning her over to Maurice's untender mercies grew more and more monstrous.

"There is more to tell you," he said, still in that swift whisper. "Drunkenness is, under some circumstances, bad enough, but it is the least of Maurice's sins. He has a cruel nature. He delights in inflicting suffering on those in his power."

"Oh, this is outrageous!" she exclaimed. "This you cannot know."

"I do know. You could not know, because you would not see that side of his nature; but such things cannot be hidden from other men. He has an insensate love of power. To make others suffer gratifies a base vanity, gives him pleasure. He is cruel to animals, willfully and wantonly. He would be cruel to children."

She gasped in smothered horror, but still she fought against belief.

"This is some cruel revenge," she said. "You hate him for some reason—perhaps he has thwarted you in some way. I know how bitter men can be. You are taking an underhanded way of getting even. Now I do not believe you at all."

"I never saw Maurice before to-day. We are strangers. My interest is in you."

"If you are strangers, how did you get his costume?" she asked quickly. "How do you come to be in his place?"

"The Mystick Krewe needed a substitute when he was unable to take his place on the float," he said. He was thankful that he was able to answer in that fashion. It would involve his personality in further obscurity if she assumed that he was a member of the club.

The music stopped.

"Take me to my seat," she said.

"No. There will be an encore. You must finish the dance with me."

And immediately the orchestra repeated the tune. Archer swung her into the dance, and bent again to whisper near her ear. But this time his theme was different.

"I love you! I love you!" he said softly. "To you I am a stranger, but to me you are the dearest and most desirable of women. You have given form to my dreams—they were fluid before. From now on they will wear your face, your form. I may never see you again—may never dare to seek you out after this! But you will always remember that love guided you in this dance, that love whispered this once at least in your ear——"

The music stopped with a crash. With a smothered cry, Alice tore herself from the arms of the masker and fled blindly across the stage. An usher, astonished but respectful, caught her hand as she was stumbling toward the back, drew it under his arm, and guided her to the steps which led down to the débutante section. Then he turned, with wonder, curiosity, and some indignation, to look for the crimson-cloaked masker who had so evidently upset the equanimity of his partner in the dance. He had disappeared. There were three others in similar costume, but they were still paying devoted court to the ladies with whom they had danced. The usher's curiosity was sufficiently aroused to make him wonder who the four Crimson Cloaks were.

"I say, who are you four?" he asked one of them, when he saw him by himself.

The man he addressed happened to be Alan Stewart. He mentioned the names of the others. "Why?" he asked.

The usher told him that the pretty girl dancing with one of the Crimson Cloaks had appeared to be upset. Stewart frowned.

"That would be Maurice," he said. "Darned fool! He has been drinking. I suppose the girl saw it and was offended." He looked about for Maurice, but the fourth Crimson Cloak had gone.

Archer made his way out of the theater and into the dark, narrow street in a sort of daze. He was not sorry he had denounced Maurice—he had intended to do that from the moment he saw the way clear. He had told her nothing but the truth, and it was a truth she ought to know.

But why, in the name of sanity, had he gone on to make love to her? That he had not intended. The words had tumbled out before he was aware. They, too, held the truth, though. His dreams of the Not Impossible She had suddenly crystallized and taken the form of Alice Cheney! She had taken possession of his imagination as if by divine right.

CHAPTER III.

Archer's costume attracted no attention on the street. The populace was accustomed to such sights. He found the front door of the Condé House open, and entered without

ringing. As he went up the stairs he glanced down into the office, and to his surprise—and also, it must be admitted, a little to his dismay—he saw that the "American daughter" who had opposed his entry had returned.

He entered his own room quietly, and for a moment stood listening for any sound from the adjoining room where he had left Maurice. Everything was still. He slipped out of the cloak, removed his cap and mask, and then tapped softly at the communicating door—softly, so as not to awaken a sleeper, if he slept ever so lightly. But there was no answering sound within. He then unlocked the door and went in. By the hall light which came through the transom, he could see that Maurice was still lying sprawled across the bed. Archer laid the carnival costume beside him and was turning away when something peculiar in the recumbent figure caught his attention. He paused and looked more closely. There was a ragged wound on one side of the upturned face, and the bed was soaked in blood. Maurice was dead, though the rigidity of death had not yet come to the nerveless body.

Archer had long lost any sense of shock at the sight of violent death. He turned on the lights and glanced observantly about the room, but noted no sign of disorder. Everything was as he had seen it when he left. He tried the door quietly, and found that it was not locked. As he moved, a glint of light on the rug before the bed caught his eye, and he stooped to pick up a ring. It was a small ring of twisted strands of gold, set with three square-cut turquoises in a row. From its size, it might have belonged to a child, or a girl with a very small hand.

From its position, it must have dropped where it was very recently. The moving of the rug, almost any step crossing the room, must have dislodged it. It was a curious contrast, that innocent-looking ring and this scene of unquestionable murder. Archer dropped the trifle into his pocket, still keeping his fingers upon it as he looked with grave earnestness upon the figure on the bed. He wished now that he had not said anything to Alice Cheney. Since she was so soon to be set free——

Suddenly he started. Men do not often "start" in real life, except in response to some physical shock, but Archer actually flinched as though he had been stung by something more tangible than a thought. The conviction had flashed upon him that he knew the ring. When he had thrust his hand inside of Dane's shirt to measure his faint heartbeats, his fingers had encountered a small ring made of twisted strands and set with three square-cut stones. He told himself that he might easily be mistaken—that he would not swear to the ring in a court of law—but he had the sensitive fingers of the surgeon, and for himself he could not disregard their testimony. He felt sure that the ring was Dane's.

The sound of a light footstep ascending the stairs came to his ear, and on the prompting of instinct he switched off the light. As he moved in the dark his foot struck some object on the floor—and the sharp report of a pistol told him that he had kicked the weapon which Maurice's assailant must have flung down! Instinct and reason were in accord when he hastily threw himself into his own darkened room and softly turned the key in the lock. The next moment there was a quick nervous knock at the door—the door of his own room, not Maurice's.

"Leon! Are you there?" The voice was the voice of Marie, though the tone was very different from the tone she had used to him earlier in the evening. Archer recalled, with relief, that he had turned the key in that lock, also, when he had entered, and he had reason to, for the next moment the door was tried.

"Leon! Leon! Open the door!" This time the voice was louder, and sounded frightened.

Archer made no movement that could betray his presence, and after a moment he heard the girl go to the next door—the door of the room where Maurice lay. Here she knocked boldly. Archer understood her intention. She had doubtless seen him, in Maurice's costume, go up the stairs, and she had taken for granted that her "captain" was in the front room reserved for him. She had followed him, she must have heard the shot while she was on the stairs, she was alarmed.

Her use of Maurice's name and her attempt to enter the room indicated the relations on which they had stood. Now, knowing that she could gain access to this room through the other, she was testing its occupancy. She would find that door unlocked, and would go in and make the discovery.

Archer did not want to be caught in hiding, neither did he wish to explain his part in what had gone before—or to account for the ring in his pocket.

He went to his front window and looked out. A vague impression that a fire escape ran past it was confirmed. It came from above and ended just below his window, with a drop of some fifteen feet to the ground. He had every wish to leave the Condé House unobserved, but he had no desire to risk a sprained ankle in a futile attempt. As he glanced up again, he saw the figure of a man running in a crouching attitude along the edge of the roof. Then it disappeared. Evidently there was some means of descent between the house itself and the huge, outside cistern which remained as a survival from the old days of typhoid-fever epidemics. The upper end of the fire escape was within easy reach of the cistern. Archer took to it without wasting a moment, climbing up instead of down, and found, as he had surmised, that this antique bit of architecture afforded a comparatively easy means of descent to the ground. He lost no time in getting to the street.

The narrow street was full of people streaming homeward from Canal Street and the parade. He mingled naturally with the crowd, but at the end of the block he paused to light a cigarette and look backward. A policeman ran past him in the direction of the Condé House, taking the middle of the street for the sake of speed. Curious stragglers turned to watch, or to follow him, and when he entered the Condé House there was a little crowd at his heels. But the doors were shut fast behind him and the rabble denied. By the lights that flashed up in every dark window of the little hotel, it was clear that there was even a greater commotion within than without.

Archer changed his direction at the corner, and in the course of time found his way to the Monteleone. His room was in readiness, and he entered it with a sense of having found a needed haven in a storm. His watch told him that it was half past eleven.

CHAPTER IV.

It was in vain, however, that Archer tried to recover the carefree state of mind he had enjoyed a few hours before. He had come to "the playground of America" to rest his nerves, and this was what he had got into! That Maurice should have been killed did not, in itself, greatly trouble him, and still less did it surprise him. A man of that sort must have bitter enemies. Thinking of Alice Cheney he could have found it cause for thankfulness, and this quite apart from any thought of himself and his romantic declarations of a few hours past. She was too sweet a girl to be sacrificed, and that was enough.

But Dane had been in Maurice's room that night, and that troubled him greatly. The ring did not necessarily prove that Dane had killed the man. He might have gone into the room, as Archer himself had done, and found Maurice dead. Or he might have been there, and lost his ring there, earlier in the evening. In either case, he would naturally speak of his visit—if innocent. But suppose he did not speak? Dane was, in a manner, his patient, and professional obligations would seal his lips in all ordinary circumstances. Beyond that, his sympathies were with Dane, not Maurice.

And yet—here was a case of murder. He stared into the darkness for long hours, and back of all the visions that floated past there was always the startled face of Alice Cheney. Involuntarily he groaned aloud.

In spite of his sleeplessness, he was the first one in the breakfast room, the next morning. On his way through the office he had secured the morning papers, and he opened them while waiting for his coffee.

The death of Captain Leon Maurice was featured in the headlines of all of them, though the details were of the scantiest. It was given out, however, that Maurice had attended the ball at the French Opera House, and had left early. He had returned to the Condé House, where he had a room reserved for his use when in the city, and had gone upstairs without stopping to speak to any one, about eleven. He was still in costume.

A few minutes after he entered his room on the second floor, a shot was heard by Miss Marie Donné, the clerk of the hotel and daughter of the proprietor, but its location was not immediately identified, owing to the fact that other returning guests at the hotel had simultaneously made the discovery that their rooms had been looted during their absence that evening, and there was in consequence a general commotion and outcry. Maurice was found where he had fallen

across the bed, with his discarded costume beside him.

Archer was still digesting this account when he heard his name called from the hall.

"Telephone call, Doctor Archer."

It was Alice Cheney's voice that came to him over the wire—subdued and rather expressionless, as though she were holding it steadily under control.

"Doctor Archer, would it be possible for you to come to us? My brother has had another bad turn, and he wanted me to try to get you. I know it is an imposition, but we know no one else——"

"I'll come at once. Of course. Your address——"

She gave it.

"I'll be there immediately."

All the way to Miss Cheney's he was debating with himself whether she could know of Maurice's death or not. Had she seen the papers? If she had, her self-control was wonderful. Her voice had sounded strained, but the illness of her brother was sufficient to account for that. He had seen yesterday how anxiously she watched over Dane. To his relief, it was Mrs. Cheney who met him at the door.

"This is most kind of you," she fluttered. "Neal would not consent to our calling in a stranger, if you could possibly come."

"Did he faint again?"

"No, but this terrible news upset him. You have seen the papers?"

"Yes."

"In Neal's weak condition, it was too much for him. I went to his room with the paper quite early—I saw the paper first, and I thought he would help me break the news to Alice. But when I told him, it set him off into hysterics—laughing and crying and unable to stop. I had to call Alice to help me with him."

"It must have been a fearful shock for Miss Cheney—the news about Mr. Maurice, I mean."

"Yes," Mrs. Cheney said, somewhat vaguely. "But she is so strong—we all depend on Alice. And she was terribly worried about Neal." It was evident that, to Mrs. Cheney, Neal's illness quite dwarfed the tragedy at the Condé House.

"Now, may I see him?"

She led him down the hall. "We turned this little reception room into a bedroom for Neal, to save him the stairs," she said, and opened the door.

"Neal, here is Doctor Archer."

Archer gently took the door from her and shut it, leaving her on the outside. Another door, beyond the bed, quivered as it was closed. Evidently Alice Cheney needed no hint that he would want to be alone with his patient. From the bed Dane turned a haggard face toward him.

"Doctor, I'm burning up with fever. Can't you give me something to get me on my feet? I can't lie here, shaking and burning up, while there are all these things to attend to. Is it malaria that has got hold of me? He was lying on top of his bed, a dressing gown over his pajamas, and the thin hand that Archer took in his own was shaking as if with an ague. Archer's finger slid over the pulse, and after a minute he said quietly:

"You have no fever."

Dane stared at him. "But I have! Can't I feel it pouring through my veins? And, look here!" He pushed his hair back from his forehead. It was damp with sweat.

"No fever," Doctor Archer repeated calmly. "I'll prove it to you."

He put his clinical thermometer under his patient's tongue, and while he waited for the record he talked in a commonplace manner about trivialities.

"You were lucky to have a furnished house placed at your disposal like this. The hotels are jammed. I couldn't get possession of my room at the Monteleone until midnight. I wasn't sure I could get it at all, so I looked into the Condé House last night on a chance. But fortunately I got my room all right after all. I saw you when you passed the Condé House in the early evening. You were going to Canal Street, I suppose. I went down myself later on. There! Here's the proof that your temperature is perfectly normal." He held the little thermometer before Dane's eyes.

"But what makes me feel so feverish?" persisted Dane.

"Nerves. You were tired yesterday, you probably did too much sightseeing last night, and then the news about Maurice this morning was the final blow—or straw."

"Nerves! Like a girl!" Dane scoffed. He shut his eyes, and Archer knew it was to hide tears.

"Be more respectful to your nervous system, young man," he said cheerfully. "Now I am going to ask you to sit up—on that chair by the window—while I make an examination."

Dane pulled himself languidly up from the bed, and, as he did so, a tiny object fell from the folds of his dressing gown to the floor. It rolled across the rug, like a coin. With a swift, covert glance at Archer, he stooped to recover it, and hid it in the palm of his hand. Archer, with his back turned, was moving the chair he had designated into a better position. He had no need to glance at the ring of twisted gold strands which he had himself cunningly hidden in the folds of Dane's gown a minute before. Instead, he looked into Dane's eyes, from which fear had fled like a shadow. They were dancing with tense excitement.

Archer's examination of his patient was thorough, and when it was finished he knew a good deal more about Dane's physical state than he had any intention of disclosing to the young man himself. He recognized the necessity, however, of somehow warning his mother, or Miss Cheney. A second blow must not fall upon them unprepared.

There was a tap at the door.

"That's mother," said Dane, with resignation. "She would, of course. You might as well let her in."

It was Mrs. Cheney, but not on quite so futile an errand as Dane supposed.

"May I come in?" she asked, as she entered. Then she saw Dane by the window, and she checked herself to clasp her hands in joy. "Oh, Neal! How much better you look already! It's a miracle!"

Archer winked openly at Dane. "Don't give me away, Dane. I don't always get the credit I deserve, so this merely averages things up."

"But he does look wonderfully better," she persisted. "There's a man here who wanted to see you, Neal, and I said you couldn't see any one. Then he wanted the name of some friend, and I was just going to ask Doctor Archer if he would add to our obligations by consenting to talk to him—he evidently thinks he can't talk to a woman!"

"What does he want to see me about?" Dane asked, drawing his heavy eyebrows together.

"Oh, it's about this terrible affair, of course. He is a brother-in-law of Mr. Maurice's, and he wants to consult with you as Alice's brother. He regards you as the head of the family, of course."

"Would you like to have me see him for you?" Archer asked quietly.

"I'd like to have you see him with me," Dane answered. "I feel quite equal to meeting him, and it is better I should. But I'd be glad to have you there. If you will go and talk to him while I dress, I'll come out."

Archer nodded, and held the door open for Mrs. Cheney. In the hall she caught his hand. For a frightened moment he thought she was going to kiss it.

"It's wonderful!" she said, in a hurried whisper. "You evidently understand Neal's case perfectly. Oh, I hope you are going to stay here long enough to see him through!"

"I hope it may be possible," Archer said quietly. He wondered what Mrs. Cheney would say if he confessed that he had given Dane nothing whatsoever in the way of medicine.

There was neither time nor opportunity for anything further. Mrs. Cheney opened the door to the drawing-room across the hall, and Archer entered.

CHAPTER V.

Alan Stewart rose as Archer entered. He was a striking-looking man of about thirty-five, conventional in dress and somewhat formal in manner. Archer sized him up as obstinate and unimaginative, even while he was shaking hands with him.

"I am Doctor Archer," he said in introduction. "Mr. Dane will be here in a few minutes. He wishes to see you, even though he is not in condition to stand any great nervous strain. He had a rather bad attack yesterday on the train."

Stewart bowed. "Mrs. Cheney told me he was not well. I am glad you are here. This is a very distressing situation for all concerned, Doctor Archer."

"Yes. You are related to Mr. Maurice by marriage, I understand," Archer said. He was looking at Stewart with new interest, for he had recognized his voice as that of the man who had been with Maurice at the Condé House.

"Yes. My wife is his sister. There is also a younger sister, and two boys, but practically I am the head of the family, as Leon's father is an old man, and quite feeble. I thought it advisable to consult with Miss Cheney's brother in a matter which concerns her so nearly."

Just then Dane entered the room.

"I am sorry to learn that you are not altogether fit, Mr. Dane," Stewart said, with formal courtesy. "I do not wish to burden you in any way, but as Miss Cheney's nearest male relative I felt I should consult with you before taking a decisive step in an important matter."

"I am sure that my sister would wish to leave all the arrangements to Maurice's family," Dane said quickly. There was almost a touch of distaste in his manner.

"I am not referring to the arrangements," Stewart said. "The question I have in mind is in connection with engaging a detective to investigate Maurice's murder." He spoke with a severity that indicated indignation.

Archer glanced quickly from him to Dane. Dane sat silent, his head thrown back against his chair. If he felt surprise, he did not express it. His eyes were on Stewart, but he said nothing. It was Archer who answered.

"Why do you consider a detective necessary?" he asked. "Isn't the police force taking the matter up?"

"I have been in consultation with the chief of police this morning," Stewart said, with dignified annoyance, "but he will consider nothing but his own theory of the crime."

"May I ask what that theory is?"

"Why, it seems that there was some petty thievery at the Condé House last night, and he wants to connect the two things. His idea is that Maurice found a burglar in his room when he returned from the ball, and that the man shot Maurice, in order to make his own escape."

"And you are unwilling to accept that theory?"

"I certainly am. I consider it absurd. I happen to know that Maurice was—well, not quite himself, last evening. I have reason to question whether he attended the ball at all. It seems to me more probable that some enemy followed him, found him unconscious, and brutally murdered him."

"You have no suspicion against any one in particular?"

"No. But I think there should be a more intelligent and thorough investigation than the police seem disposed to make."

Again Archer glanced at Dane, but the boy seemed determined to hold himself aloof from the discussion.

"Better accept the police version, Mr. Stewart," Archer said seriously.

Stewart stared. "Wh-what?"

"Better let the matter be closed up in routine fashion."

"I don't understand you." He turned pointedly to Neal. "Don't you think there should be a thorough investigation, Mr. Dane?"

Dane looked pale and ill, but entirely master of himself. "I should like to know why Doctor Archer thinks it inadvisable to pursue the matter," he said.

"I am thinking of the living," said Archer. "I am thinking of his old father, his young brothers, his sisters, as well as of Miss Cheney. If Maurice was killed by some enemy, as you suggest, Mr. Stewart, there is some ugly story back of the crime. By insisting on dragging it into the light, you will besmirch his memory and bring humiliation on all those who belonged to him."

"You mean that if he was killed by some one who had a personal grudge to satisfy, you would consider that a good reason for hushing the matter up?" Stewart towered in his astonishment until Archer found it hard to suppress a smile, though this was no smiling matter, and he knew it. He was determinedly calm and unprovocative in his reply.

"We don't know who killed him. The chief of police may be quite correct in his theory. I am merely telling you what may happen to Maurice's reputation, if you turn the searchlight of investigation upon his career."

But Stewart seemed unable even to consider that point of view. "I never heard of such an outrageous proposition," he declared, with indignation. "Is the law to have no effect? Is a murderer to go unpunished?"

Archer shrugged his shoulders. "The practical question is whether you are more concerned to avenge the dead or to protect the living." He paused a moment, and then added in a conciliatory manner: "We know so little about what may have led some man to take the law into his own hands——"

"The law!" Stewart interrupted. "The law had no claim on Maurice. He was not a criminal."

"Not technically. But it does not follow that he was blameless. If you reject the idea that a burglar shot him, you have to admit that some one shot him for a reason."

Stewart turned to Dane. "Do you support Doctor Archer in his extraordinary position?" he demanded.

"Doctor Archer has surprised me by his viewpoint," he said thoughtfully, "but, speaking for my sister, I see there is something in it. Now that she is freed——"

"What?"

"I mean, now that she is not going to marry him, I see nothing to be gained by letting her know what a blackguard he was." He spoke with a malicious sweetness that quite plainly was not to be taken at its face value.

Stewart looked about for his hat and gloves. "I cannot say what I think of your extraordinary remarks. I shall at once take steps to engage a detective on my own account."

"May I suggest that you first consult with your wife?" said Archer.

"My wife?"

"Yes. Maurice's sister. If you told her what I have said, would she be willing to have her brother's character exposed to the perhaps unnecessarily cruel light of an investigation?"

Stewart hesitated. He was staggered, but he distinctly objected to having his hand forced.

"I am not in the habit of referring such questions to my wife," he said coldly. "I shall certainly consult a detective."

And he took his departure with some abridgment of his habitual courtesy. Archer smiled at Dane.

"At any rate, he has something new to think about."

"Yes." Dane was staring hard at him. "You were thinking about—those stories I told you—about the man called Morris."

"I had that in mind, yes. Nothing gained by having them come out now, is there?"

"No." But still Dane seemed unsatisfied. "You think, then, that he may have been justified?" he blurted out at last.

"Who?" Archer asked deliberately.

"The man who—shot Maurice?"

"I don't say that. Probably he was not justified. It isn't for me to say. But I think it is up to the police department, rather than Stewart, to investigate the matter."

"Yes," said Dane thoughtfully.

"We have no real reason for assuming that the police theory is not correct," Archer added. Dane made no reply, and Archer added, more pointedly, "Or have you any theory of your own?"

The faintest hint of a satirical smile twitched Dane's cheek.

"No, I have no theory about it," he said.

CHAPTER VI.

When Alice fled from the stage, after her first and only dance at the ball, it was with something of the terror that one has in a dream when flying from a fate that cannot be escaped. What she had heard had shaken her nerves as an earthquake, or a meteor in her path, or any other portent of nature, might. But it had not touched her heart. It was not, however, until much later that she recognized this fact and its significance.

She did not see the anxious looks that followed her as she ran through the foyer and out into the night. The young men on the committee of arrangements, who were near the door, exchanged surprised looks, and two of them quietly followed her as she ran down the steps into the street. But here the sense of responsibility for her stepmother, which had been the habit of a lifetime, came to her rescue. Mrs. Cheney could not be left here. Though Neal had said he would look them up when the ball was over, no one, in the meantime, knew where he was. Alice pulled her wits together and returned to the opera house. She knew where Mrs. Cheney was seated, in one of the quaint old stalls on the first balcony, and made her way to her.

"I am not going to dance any more," she said. "I'm tired. I'll sit here with you until you are ready to go home."

"I saw you dancing," said her stepmother, with eager interest. "Was that Leon Maurice in the crimson cloak?"

Alice was glad that the little flurry accompanying her acceptance of an offered seat beside Mrs. Cheney made an answer at the moment unnecessary. She leaned back and closed her eyes, and so avoided the need of appearing either interested or intelligent. But behind the shelter of her closed lids, her staggered brain began to think.

The man who had spoken to her in that terrifying whisper knew Leon, and knew her. But she did not know him. That, partly, was why the whole episode seemed so formidable. If an acquaintance had spoken as he had, it would have been sheer impertinence, and her indignation would have swallowed up all possibility of giving consideration to his words. But this imper-

sonal voice out of the unknown she could not put away from her thoughts.

And, curiously enough, she felt that this stranger had spoken the truth. That was another element of terror. She knew that his every word was based on a truth her inmost self had already recognized, though it had never been expressed, though she had not even consciously hidden it from herself. She had not known that it was buried.

Swiftly the panorama of Maurice's impetuous courtship was thrown up into consciousness by memory. She had come down to New Orleans two years ago on the invitation of an old college friend. She had been weary in mind and body. The war had pressed upon her through long months of vicarious anguish. Then, while she was here, America had thrown herself into the turmoil, and in the passionate exaltation of the hour, every man who donned the khaki had taken on a glory not his own. Leon Maurice met every specification for the perfect knight, so far as looks went, and his rapid and romantic love-making had carried Alice off her feet.

Three weeks after their first meeting she found she was engaged to him, although really she knew him hardly better than she did any other of the two dozen young officers who were on her hostess' calling list. This sense that he was a stranger, that she did not really know him, had come to her disquietingly a number of times during the months in which their acquaintance had progressed by correspondence. Occasionally something he said, more frequently something he did not say, had revealed to her that there was a chasm between their minds which the glamour of emotional attraction could not forever hide. And now this masked dancer had said, in words that were as convincing as though they had come from an oracle, that this chasm hid cruelty and drunkenness and all unworthiness.

Mrs. Cheney turned to speak to her.

"Are we to wait for Mr. Maurice?" she asked. She tried to speak brightly, poor lady, but her face betrayed the weariness of a long journey and a disturbing day.

Alice aroused herself. "No, dear. He would not be free, until very late. We'll go by ourselves. I'd be glad to go now, if you don't mind."

Mrs. Cheney rose with obvious relief, and they went down to the street, where they found a taxi in waiting.

"I don't suppose there would be any use trying to find Neal," Mrs. Cheney said wistfully.

"No use at all, in that crowd," Alice answered absently. "He is probably sight-seeing, and will come home when he wants to." She wanted nothing but to get by herself where she could think—or go over the ground again and again in the treadwheel way that had the semblance of thinking, without its results. Or—to go blessedly to sleep.

But sleep did not come until late, and when she did drop off she was awakened by hearing Neal entering and going to his room, which was just below her own. A clock in the hall struck three. She had wakened sufficiently to experience anew the feeling with which she had lain down, that something horrible had come close to her life—something that she wanted to push away. Very early in the morning her fitful slumber was broken again by the entrance of Mrs. Cheney, in kimono and slippers.

"Oh, Alice, darling, do wake up," that distracted lady cried. "Neal is desperately ill! Do you know how we could find that doctor who helped him on the train yesterday?"

"He was going to the Monteleone. I'll telephone" said Alice, brushing the sleep from her heavy eyes.

"And—there's something else. Something terrible. I don't know how to tell you, darling, but I can't have you see it first in the paper. Neal saw it, and it has upset him frightfully. Oh, Alice——"

"Is it about Leon?" Alice asked, with a swift intuition.

"Yes. Oh, Alice! Some one has killed him."

Alice Cheney was perhaps not so saintlike as Archer imagined, but he was right in guessing that consideration for others always came before her own affairs, and that is a good practical substitute for saintliness. When her father married pretty little Mrs. Dane, Alice was barely twelve. She became very fond of her stepmother, but from the beginning she realized that her new mother's rôle in life was to be pretty, and that other people would always have to look out for her. So Alice assumed the position of watchful guardian.

She was six months older than her new brother, but from the attitude she took of

wise adviser, she might have been six years older. When her father died, she no more thought of leaving her step relations than she would have had she legally adopted them. It was fortunate for them that she did not, as most of the money in the family was what was invested in her name. She had been taking care of Mrs. Cheney ever since, and of Neal, more than he knew.

When Mrs. Cheney aroused her from her troubled sleep with her two messages of disaster, Alice was so immediately involved in concern about Neal that it was only part of a mind that she could spare for the second. The two colored women, whose services had been engaged with the house, did not sleep on the premises, and had not yet appeared. Her stepmother was helpless. It was, therefore, Alice who had to take on her shoulders the immediate prosaic burdens of the occasion. She ministered to Neal as best she could, until she heard the doctor enter the house, then she fled to her room and shut her door against the curious maid, Nini, who came ostensibly to ask orders for breakfast, but really to stare with avid eyes at the white girl whose lover had been killed.

She had brought up the paper from Neal's room, and while she read and reread the account of the Condé House tragedy, she wondered dumbly at the paralysis which seemed to have fallen upon her emotions. She should, surely, have felt prostrated by grief, but instead she was chiefly anxious about Neal, and bewildered by a sense of responsibilities which she did not understand. Her thoughts flew in distraction from one point to another until she clasped her head in her hands with a dizzy feeling that the whole world was going around, and that she didn't know what to do about it.

Then she heard Archer's voice downstairs, quiet and purposeful. The burden of decision dropped from her. All would be taken care of without her. She laid her head on her pillow and wept, but these were the gentle tears that fall for a lost illusion, and not the devastating tempest of hopeless passion.

CHAPTER VII.

When Archer left the house in Royal Street, the thing uppermost in his mind was the importance of stopping Stewart's proposed investigation, if possible. With this in view, he inquired his way to the police headquarters.

He had no immediate anxiety in regard to Neal Dane. That young man had shown remarkable resilience. The moment he discovered his ring, the tense nervous agitation which had seemed like a consuming fever had left him. Archer thought he understood. The boy had missed his ring, and, not knowing where he might have lost it, had feared that it would be found in the room of the murdered man. But evidently his uncertainty had made it possible for him to believe that, after all, the cord must have broken in his own room and that the ring had slipped into some fold of his dressing gown.

Had his visit to Maurice's room been innocent, or not? Archer might as well have tossed a coin for answer as to try to settle the question by recalling Neal's manner. But putting Neal, and his guilt or innocence, quite aside, he wanted to stop Stewart. Maurice was dead. The sooner that he could be forgotten, the better!

After explaining himself and his errand to various subordinates he finally succeeded in gaining admission to the office of Chief of Police Burke. Burke looked like a picture of the typical Confederate veteran, though this must have been due to inheritance or environment, for he could not have been over fifty. His long white mustache swept like two drooping swallow's wings over his well-cut mouth, and his gray eyes were almost too romantic for a police officer. But his chin, in spite of its dimple, spelled obstinacy. He looked up to meet Archer with official politeness but with no superfluous warmth.

"You probably wish that laymen would keep out, Mr. Burke," Archer said, with an understanding smile. "I only wanted to ask if you had any information in regard to the Maurice case which you would like to give to Maurice's fiancée, Miss Cheney, instead of leaving her dependent on the daily papers for your report." He laid his card, with his hotel penciled under his name, on the desk. "Miss Cheney's brother, Mr. Neal Dane, would naturally call on you, but he is ill, and I am his friend as well as physician."

"I suppose you have come to suggest that the department do something," he said dryly.

"No, I have no suggestion to make to you, though, of course, I feel that the sooner the matter is closed up and forgotten the better."

"Why do you say that?"

"I am thinking of Miss Cheney. I should like to get her mind off of the sensational features of the case—have her feel that it is all done with. I am a physician, not a criminologist. My interest is in the welfare of the living. The dead are beyond my care."

Burke studied his visitor closely for a moment, but Archer's face said nothing more than his words. The chief leaned back in his chair in a relaxed manner.

"We expect to put our hand on the man within a few hours," he said. "This is not to be repeated, Doctor Archer. But the fact of the matter is that we know who did it. We knew as soon as the report reached us."

"I hope you are right," said Archer gravely.

"I know I am right, in spite of Mr. Alan Stewart," said Burke vindictively. "Some people seem to think that the police force is chiefly occupied in directing traffic and restoring lost children to their nurses. But we really know something about crime and criminals, Doctor Archer. When a spectacular crime like this is pulled off, the police department does not throw up its hands and say, 'Oh, how awful!' neither does it go slinking about like a stage detective, examining the dust of the room with a microscope, with a view to fixing the crime on some person never before heard of. Crime is a trade, Doctor Archer, and it is carried on for profit. And we know the line of work carried on by the chief exponents of the trade. We know their signs. Now——" He hesitated, as though he had been carried beyond his intentions in talking to this stranger.

"I'll remember that this is not for publication," said Archer.

"Well, you will readily understand that when the city is full of strangers, well supplied with money, the rogues get busy. You saw that several rooms at the Condé House were ransacked?"

"Yes, I noticed that."

"Captain Maurice was also robbed, though the papers did not mention that fact."

This interested Archer keenly. "I did not know that. Mr. Stewart did not speak of it."

"Mr. Stewart disregards it, because he wants to make out that this is a case of murder. But Maurice's scarfpin is missing, and that it was jerked hastily out of the scarf is shown by the fact that a thread of the material has drawn the silk up in a pucker. Stewart admits that the pin was valuable. Taken in connection with the other robberies at the Condé, it is not difficult to reconstruct the crime."

"How do you see it?" Archer asked, with interest.

"Maurice came back from the ball very early about eleven. The thief was then in his room. Maurice flung his costume on the bed—he probably had it half off when he entered—and gave fight. He was a powerful man, and the man we suspect is an undersized weakling. His name in the underworld is 'The Weasel.' He never provokes a fight, but he goes armed, as most burglars do not, because he is a physical coward. When Maurice came at him, he shot. Twice. Then in terror he flung down the revolver with two chambers discharged. Maurice fell across the bed in the position in which he was found. The thief did not wait to go through his pockets, but did snatch the pin out of his scarf, and then slipped out into some passageway before Miss Donné, who heard the shot, got upstairs. These details almost exactly duplicate a crime the Weasel committed five years ago."

"He escaped then. Or was he convicted?"

"He was convicted, sentenced to life imprisonment, and escaped from prison a few months ago. We have been waiting for him to show his hand. He has done it—and we are ready for him."

"You have not caught him yet?"

"No. But we shall!"

This was a new angle of affairs, and Archer sat silent a moment considering it. He tried to recall whether Maurice had had a pin in his scarf when he saw him on the bed. He could not be sure. He had not noticed a pin, but neither had he noticed a disarranged or puckered scarf.

"Did you know Maurice?" the chief asked, shooting a sharp glance at him.

Archer pulled his thoughts back. "I met him yesterday for the first time. I came down with the Cheney party—Miss Cheney, her stepmother, and her stepbrother, Neal Dane. Maurice joined them a few stations up the line. Miss Cheney was the only one of the party who had met him before."

Burke nodded. "Stewart told me about Miss Cheney and her arrival. Maurice had engaged a furnished house for the party, I understand."

"I believe so."

Burke played silent scales on the top of his desk for a moment. "Did Maurice say anything in your hearing about where he was going to stop?" he asked abruptly.

"No. But there was no occasion for him to do so. I left the party at the station. Why, if I may ask?"

"Well, Stewart seemed to think that he usually stopped at the St. Charles."

"The Condé is all right, isn't it?"

"Oh, entirely respectable. But it is rather a boarding house than a hotel—run by a widow, Mrs. Donné. Not in Maurice's class, exactly."

"The city is pretty full."

"I know that, mighty well," smiled the chief, rising with a nod to indicate that the interview was over.

Archer had his own ideas as to why the captain went to the Condé House, but there was no need to further blacken Maurice's memory. He took his departure without further words. But with all his heart he was hoping that Chief Burke would capture the Weasel and prove his theory before Stewart took any steps.

CHAPTER VIII.

Stewart had left the house in Royal Street with the feeling that his dignity had been affronted. His opinion had been disregarded, his suggestion set aside, and his family disparaged! He was saturated with the idea of what he owed to himself, and though he had been daunted for a moment when Archer suggested that there might be scandal of some sort involved with the murder, this fear was soon submerged by the rising tide of his affronted self-importance. His brother-in-law had been murdered—not just somebody, or anybody, but his brother-in-law. Something must be done. Everything must be done!

So he hunted up the office of Jerome Goff on one of the intricate little streets north of Canal. He knew the name, because Goff ran a small standing advertisement in the papers announcing to all who might be interested that he was a private detective.

The door was opened to him by a tall, ungainly man, whose angular and careless aspect suggested the traditional figure of Lincoln. He barely escaped shabbiness, and, if his general air of indifference was a true index of his mind, he escaped it more by accident than by design. Stewart glanced from the man to the room, which was equally lacking in elegance.

"Mr. Goff?" he asked, with some hesitation.

"Yes. Will you come inside?"

Stewart came in, and Goff gravely closed the door. The detective had by no means been unaware of that swift appraisement, but beyond a half-cynical smile he gave no sign. As a matter of fact, Stewart did not mind the shabbiness. He was so used to projecting his own importance forward to cover everything he appropriated that he did not mind its absence in the man he faced. If he once adopted him into his service, Goff would be, by that act, ennobled!

Goff had been born on an Illinois farm, and he had developed into a detective chiefly because Nature had set his eyes too close together. That trifling divergence from the normal—no more than half an inch—gave him a penetrating look which he had been forced to live up to all his life.

His first glance at Stewart took in the man's self-importance and agitation, and he jumped to the conclusion, not unwarranted by his professional experience, that his new client's troubles were marital. These handsome, aristocratic Southerners—being born on an Illinois farm he held firmly to the faith that all Southerners were aristocratic—were so often jealous of their wives!

"We are quite private here," he said, in a reassuring tone, closing the door between the outer office and the room into which he had inducted Stewart. "And, of course, anything you may wish to say to me will be regarded as confidential."

"I haven't anything confidential to say to you," Stewart said, in some surprise. "What I want is to have you find out who murdered my brother-in-law, Mr. Leon Maurice."

"I see." Goff was surprised in his turn, and it took him a moment to readjust his mind. "Exactly. I see. The gentleman who was found dead at the Condé House this morning."

"Who was murdered at the Condé House last night," Stewart corrected him firmly.

"Yes, of course. But—the police department will naturally——"

"I have been to see Chief Burke this morning. I am not satisfied with his attitude, nor with—with the attitude of other parties." He frowned at Goff vicariously. "I want to get at the facts. I want the murderer found and convicted."

"Yes." Goff spoke without enthusiasm. He knew, no one better, that with the police on the job, there was little he could do. The affairs brought to him were not, as a rule, police matters. He tried to hedge a bit.

"From what I saw in the papers," he said, "I gathered that the police not only have a definite idea as to the criminal, but that they expect to have him under lock and key in short order."

"Yes, I know that is what they gave out, but I am not satisfied. Now, here is a fact, Mr. Goff, that Chief Burke disregards because he has made up his mind as to what he wants to prove. Maurice was to have been in the pageant last night. I took his costume to his room in the Condé House last evening at seven o'clock, and he was drunk at that time. Sleepy drunk." Stewart struck his knee with his clenched fist. "I talked with him. He was too drunk to answer intelligently."

"Was he in the habit of getting drunk?" Goff asked.

"He has always drunk more or less, but of late it has been more. And I have noticed before this how he would go off suddenly when he had had a glass too much. Seemed to drop into a stupor all at once."

Goff nodded. "I have seen men affected that way."

"Well, sir, I left his costume with him, but I had no idea that he would be able to put in an appearance. If you had seen him you would understand that he simply couldn't. His place on the float was on the rear corner, and we could get along without him, if we had to. Nobody would have known the difference. When the float started he was not on. I looked back for him at the last minute. After I was in my own place I couldn't see him—couldn't see the place where he was supposed to stand, I mean. But when we dismounted at the French Opera House, he was in his place—*or some one else was.*"

Goff looked up alertly. This began to look like a case, after all.

"Did you speak to him?"

"No, I had to hurry in to help arrange the first tableau, and I could not take the time. I merely thought that Maurice had braced up, and that, after all, he couldn't have been as drunk as he looked. I thought no more about it until this morning, when I got the news of his murder."

"Then you thought——"

"I thought back over the evening. As I said a moment ago, Maurice was not on the float when we started. A man I took for Maurice was on the float when we dismounted. That means he must have jumped on while we were moving. Now, even if Maurice was sober enough to dress and come after me, he was too drunk to do anything so acrobatic as getting on the float while we were plunging down the street. It was all I could do to hold my place."

"I suppose you made this same suggestion to Burke?" said Goff. He was thinking. It sounded as though there might be something in Stewart's suspicion, but if Burke had turned the idea down, it behooved him to be cautious about accepting it.

"Yes, I did. But he thinks he has spotted the man who killed Maurice, and he doesn't want to consider any fact which would interfere with that theory."

"Yes, I know Burke," Goff acknowledged.

"He has nothing to support his theory but the bare fact that other rooms at the Condé were robbed."

"Maurice was not robbed, then?"

"Well—er—there is a scarfpin missing, but that really proves nothing. It may have been lost before."

"Maurice was not married, I believe?"

"No. He was engaged to a young woman from the North, who is in New Orleans now. They came yesterday. I saw them this morning. That is, I didn't see Miss Cheney, but I saw her stepmother and her stepbrother—Dane, the young man's name is." He frowned.

"Do they agree with you as to the desirability of an investigation?" Goff asked, after a moment's study of his client's face. Long experience had given him a knack at reading a person's thoughts that was sometimes startlingly accurate.

"Dane is an invalid, and I didn't have much chance to get at his real opinion, because a friend of the family, Doctor Archer, was there, and he took it upon himself to answer for the others."

"And Doctor Archer discouraged your idea of a private investigation?" Goff asked. Things were beginning to take on a more interesting look.

"Yes." Stewart's lips shut close.

"Who is Doctor Archer?"

"He is Dane's physician. I never heard of him before. I never saw Dane before this morning, for that matter. Maurice be-

came engaged to Miss Cheney when she was here visiting some friends, two years ago. She has beauty and money, so it was a suitable match." But still he frowned to himself.

"Did her family object?" probed Goff.

"Object! How could they? Good heavens, Maurice was a match for any Yankee! Besides—she is an orphan, and independent. These—people—are not blood relations."

"I see." Goff rapidly turned over in his mind the facts he had gleaned. "I'll look into the matter a little way, Mr. Stewart, and see whether anything promises results. If I do, I'll take the case. But for the present, I simply want to feel my way a little. Is that satisfactory?"

"I suppose so," said Stewart somewhat dubiously. He would have preferred to have Goff promise immediate results. He shared the popular idea that a detective possessed some sort of magic by means of which he could bring all hidden things to light, if he set it to work. Didn't all the detective stories proceed on that theory? "You will let me hear from you as soon as possible?"

"Yes, I'll let you know as soon as I get the feel of the case in my fingers. Now give me the names of the men on your float, also Miss Cheney's address, and her home address. And Doctor Archer's home address."

"I don't know where Doctor Archer may come from," Stewart said coldly. However, he supplied the other information Goff required, and departed more or less satisfied that he had "started something."

The fact of the matter was that Goff had "seen" nothing in the case until Stewart mentioned that Maurice's fiancée, who came to the town yesterday, had money and beauty. Most of the crimes and human complications with which Goff was acquainted were due either to passion or greed. Suppose there was some one—he avoided a name at this stage—some one who wanted the girl or the girl's money? Obviously, Maurice would have been an obstacle. There are men who recognize obstacles—and there are men who remove them.

Goff's own life was as correct as simple tastes and moderate ambitions could possibly make it. He had no desire to emulate the dramatic or romantic or the criminal elements which he was in the habit of studying in human society. But it cannot be denied that the study gave him a certain pleasurable excitement. His first faint flicker of interest in the Maurice case grew as he considered the possibilities. Yes, it would be worth looking into a bit.

CHAPTER IX.

The house on Royal Street which Maurice had engaged for Mrs. Cheney was one of those picturesque antiquities which give the atmosphere of another century and of a different civilization to the older part of New Orleans. It had been built in the days when every house had to be its own fortress. The door and the windows which looked on the street were heavily shuttered, with a view to defending the inmates from the attacks of marauders. When the shutters were closed at night, it presented the blankness of a dead wall to the passers-by. The court which adjoined the house was also guarded from observation by a high, gray wall. The court itself was a tropical oasis of flowers and fountain and shade, as Archer knew from the glimpse he had had from the house windows; but certainly from the street the blank façade of the house and the high, gray, wall of the court gave the effect of a prison, and nothing else. It was far from cheerful, however picturesque it might be.

Maurice's obsequies had been conducted the day before on his home plantation outside of the city. Archer had not considered it necessary for him to attend the ceremony, especially as he knew that Stewart had punctiliously placed his limousine at Miss Cheney's disposal. When he now lifted the old-fashioned knocker he meant merely to leave his card. But it was Miss Cheney herself who opened the door.

"I saw you cross the street," she said quietly, "and I want to speak to you. Doctor Archer, would you mind taking me out for a walk, instead of coming inside?"

"Of course. Very glad to," murmured Archer.

She picked up her hat from a hall table and pinned it on without a glance at the mirror. Archer took note, and measured her absorption accordingly. There were marks of strain in her face—not placid sorrow nor wild despair, but a nervous tension which betrayed itself as well in her voice when she spoke.

"Neal is out in the court. I am not going to tell him you are here, because I want to talk to you by yourself."

They went out quietly, and Miss Cheney

closed the door behind them with a care that expressed caution.

"Where shall we go?" Archer asked.

She looked about with blank eyes. "I don't care. Just walk—any direction."

"We might go over to the Place d' Armes," he said. "It is not far. It is called Jackson Park now, but the old name seems more colorful. It really was a place for drilling soldiers in the old days, you know."

"Was it?" she said in mechanical response. She very evidently did not care whether it was or not. "Doctor Archer, I wanted to ask you—what do you think about Neal?"

"I think his condition serious," he answered gravely. He had meant to warn her as to the seriousness of Neal's condition at a favorable time, but perhaps it was as well for her to learn it now. In spite of the fact that his answer could not have been a complete surprise to her, she went very pale.

"You don't mean——"

"I don't mean that his case is hopeless. But it will require great patience and care. He should be under the eye of a competent physician. These cases of unstable nervous tension cannot be handled by any rule of thumb, Miss Cheney. The individual conditions must be watched and taken into constant consideration."

She walked on in silence for a few minutes, and Archer felt that she had not yet fully expressed what she had on her mind.

"You made a careful examination the other morning," she hesitated.

"As careful as I could, under the circumstances. He showed remarkable powers of recovery that morning, Miss Cheney. That is a very important factor in his case."

"But—his mind——"

"Oh, his mind is perfectly and completely all right," he said, in quick relief at being able to reassure her. "You haven't thought *that*, surely?"

"But aren't there cases where people seem all right, until you touch on some special idea of theirs that is—odd?"

"Yes. Have you noticed anything like that?" he asked in surprise. Dane had seemed to him quite normal, though nervous.

"He—he seems determined not to go outside of the door. He won't leave the house." She looked at him pitifully.

"You mean this house?"

"Yes."

"But he was out Monday night."

"I know. But since then—well, there was no reason why he should not have gone with me yesterday, and every reason why he should, but—he said he *couldn't* go out."

"Just a whimsey—an excuse. He didn't want to go. I'm sorry if you minded going without him——"

"Oh, it wasn't that. I didn't mind on my own account. But—it seemed so queer."

"Nerves do play queer tricks with us," said Archer thoughtfully. "Has he shown any disinclination to go out before this?"

"No. But we were stopping at a hotel before and that was different. This is the first house we have been in since he came home from the hospital."

"I'll get him out," Archer said confidently. "If it is a nervous phobia, we will surprise him out of it. In the meantime, just ignore it. Don't talk about it or try to force him. Just assume that there is no occasion for his going out. Have you noticed anything else unlike himself? Is he melancholy or morose?"

"Not in the least. He is sweeter than ever—he really is a lovely boy, Doctor Archer. That's why this—obstinacy—seemed so unnatural."

"I thought, as I approached your house just now, that it seemed rather forbidding and prisonlike. I wondered whether you might not find more cheerful accommodations somewhere else."

"I don't think we could move," she said hurriedly. And then, as though to minimize the need, she added, "It is very pleasant inside, really. And Neal loves the inclosed court."

"Well—if you like it," he said, with a slight emphasis on the personal pronoun.

"Doctor Archer, did Neal say anything to you about Mr. Maurice?"

If Archer hesitated, it was not perceptible. Experience with patients had taught him before this how to divest his face of any telltale expression.

"Your brother had mentioned the fact of your engagement before Mr. Maurice joined us on the train."

"He did not speak—bitterly?"

"No. Playfully, rather. He mentioned that he had never met Mr. Maurice."

"Then why, in his sleep, does he talk of *saving* me from him?"

"If your brother keeps you awake at night," said Archer abruptly, "he must have a nurse."

The face she turned toward him was more than startled. It hinted at terror. "Oh, no!" she said quickly. "I couldn't.. He wouldn't like that at all."

"But it is the right and sensible thing to do."

She strove to recover her composure. "Oh, he is better. He is not likely to awaken me again. Please don't think of a nurse, Doctor Archer."

"Do your maids sleep within call?"

"N-o. They sleep out of the house." She made the admission with reluctance.

"Then you are alone at night? I don't like that!"

She evidently did not like his dwelling on the point, but it was not in Alice Cheney's nature to snub any one. All she could do to escape annoyance was to withdraw from it. She withdrew now by discovering a tourist's interest in the balconies that overhung the narrow street. Archer had been studying his guide book to some purpose, and he followed her lead.

"The vantage point from which the beauties of a past generation advertised their charms in the discreet fashion permitted to virtue," he said lightly.

He did his best to draw her thoughts away from her burdened present to an impersonal past. But when he thought he had filled her mind completely with the story of the Baroness Pontalba, she turned to him from the wonderful iron tracery, to which he was directing her attention, with a sudden and irrelevant question.

"How long are you to be in New Orleans, Doctor Archer?"

"I have no definite plans."

"I hoped you might be staying—a while."

"I shall stay as long as you have the slightest need of me," he said in a low voice.

Suddenly he knew in his soul that this was why he had come.

CHAPTER X.

Goff's first act was to code a telegram to a correspondent in Miss Cheney's home town, asking for certain information. His next was to hunt up the men of the committee who had been in charge of the ball arrangements. This brought about an interview with young Arnold, the usher who had called up Alice Cheney. Goff explained his reason for making inquiries without circumlocution.

"Mr. Stewart has an idea that some one else may have used Maurice's costume and appeared in his place at the ball," he said. "If that is so, it may prove important. You saw the man. Did you notice anything in particular?"

"Well, yes," said Arnold, with a young man's interest in a mystery. "I haven't spoken of this to any one, because—well, one doesn't like to speak ill of the dead, you know, and I never thought until this minute that it wasn't Maurice. I thought it was Maurice drunk. But now that I think of it, I don't believe the man was as tall as Maurice."

"What was it you noticed?" Goff asked quietly.

"Why, I noticed that Miss Cheney seemed much disturbed. You see, Maurice—I mean the man I took for Maurice—gave me Miss Alice Cheney's name. We all knew that Maurice was engaged to Miss Cheney and that she was to be here for the ball, so when he gave me her name I was interested in identifying her, because I hadn't seen her before.

"I watched them dancing for a few minutes, and then I didn't see them again until just as the dance ended. It happened that when the music stopped, Miss Cheney and her partner were near me, and I saw her tear herself from his arms violently and stumble off in a blind sort of fashion as though she merely wanted to get away from him and didn't care where she went. As a matter of fact, she was going upstage. I hurried after her, took her arm, and brought her back to the front steps leading down to the débutante section. I noticed that instead of returning to her seat she went on and out at the rear to the foyer. Then I turned to look for Maurice. He wasn't to be seen. He must have gone out back, directly she left him."

"It didn't occur to you at the time that it might not be Maurice?"

"No. I did speak to Stewart about it at the time, and he said that Maurice was probably drunk and that Miss Cheney must have taken offense."

"You didn't speak to him yourself?"

"No."

"Do you know any one who did?"

"No. I didn't notice his speaking to any one—except, of course, Miss Cheney."

"Thank you," said Goff.

"Of course, she could tell you at once

whether it was Maurice or not," said Arnold, with a curious look at him.

"Yes, of course," said Goff, with a quiet nod.

Whether he had any intention of acting on Arnold's ingenuous suggestion, or not, need not be considered, for when he reached the street the newsboys were calling an extra, and when he bought a copy he learned that the police had captured Judd Weaver, otherwise known as the Weasel, wanted for the murder of Leon Maurice.

"Important if true," murmured Goff, stuffing the paper into his pocket. As it was important for him to know whether it was true, he made his way to a place he visited infrequently—police headquarters.

Another man who looked as though he, too, had little connection with police affairs was just a few steps ahead of him. Goff saw him give his name to a doorkeeper and obtain admission to Chief Burke's private office.

"Who's that, Jim?" he asked indifferently.

"Doctor Archer. He had an appointment with the chief. What's doing in your line?"

"Nothing much. I'll wait till the chief is at leisure."

"That won't be to-day, by the looks of things."

"I'll wait, anyhow," said Goff placidly. He took a chair where he could keep an eye on the chief's door, and opened up his newspaper.

Burke had sent for Archer, in compliance with his promise. He was in a triumphant mood, and was probably not unwilling to impress this man from New York with the fact that the police chief of New Orleans was not so slow, Southerner though he might be.

"Well, I told you that we would do it," he said cheerfully.

"Yes, and I congratulate you on making your promise good," said Archer. "You are satisfied that he is the man who killed Maurice?"

"I'd be hard to satisfy, if I were not. We have found a lot of the loot that he gathered in at the Condé House—jewelry, pocketbooks, and bank notes. We are having it assorted and identified now. As I told you before, Doctor Archer, these crooks are mostly specialists. At any rate, those that get on in the profession are. The Weasel's specialty was going through vacant rooms in the hotels, and he favored the smaller hotels, because, generally speaking, they are less carefully protected."

"Was Maurice's scarfpin among the things?" Archer asked.

A faint look of annoyance clouded Burke's open countenance. It suggested that the question was inconsiderate.

"We haven't found it yet," he said, with a trace of stiffness. "But as soon as we get him out of the hospital, and where we can question him——"

"Is he in a hospital?"

"Oh, under guard, of course. He attempted to escape, and the officer making the arrest was obliged to shoot. We'll be able to transfer him to the jail shortly. But the things we have already recovered practically prove the case, aside from his previous record. Since you seem interested——" The chief picked up an envelope from his desk. "Here is a report of the last case on which he was convicted. Criminals of his mentality do not tend to originality—they repeat themselves. Five years ago he was caught going through the rooms of the Norwich Hotel. He shot and killed the detective who tried to arrest him, but was captured by the other employees. He was sentenced for life. The judge took into consideration the fact that his mentality is subnormal."

"Has he been in prison before?"

"Several times. Usually the same sort of thing—sneak-thief work in hotels."

Archer ran his eye rapidly over the record, which substantiated the chief's statement. "But unless you find the scarfpin in his possession," he said gravely, as he handed the papers back, "you really have nothing to prove that he was in Maurice's room, have you?"

Chief Burke looked distinctly annoyed. "I have told you that we are waiting for him to recover sufficiently to answer some questions, before we make a definite charge of murder. He will probably tell us where the scarfpin is, before we are through with him."

"What hospital is he in?" Archer asked.

Burke dropped his papers back in a drawer and pushed back his chair. It was a sign that the interview was over. "In the City Hospital. I merely sent for you, Doctor Archer, because you asked me to give you personally any information possible."

"Yes. Thank you very much, chief," said Archer, taking the hint.

As he passed through the waiting room on his way to the street, Archer noticed a thin, melancholy man, with close-set eyes, reading a newspaper. The man did not notice him, but when he had stepped into the street the man dropped his paper into the wastebasket, rose negligently, and walked to the door.

"I think the chief is disengaged now, Mr. Goff," the telephone girl volunteered.

Goff nodded. "I'll drop in again later. Just now I have an engagement." He went out, still with that air of casual indifference, and glanced carelessly down the street. Archer was apparently asking directions of the traffic man on the corner. Goff saw him hail a street car, waited till he was on it and around the corner, and then approached the policeman.

"What did that chap want to know, Mike?" he asked easily.

"Wanted to know how to get to the City Hospital. Trailing him?"

"Maybe I am. I don't know myself, yet."

He did not follow Archer to the City Hospital. He could guess his errand there easily enough, for he had not been fifteen minutes in the outer office without learning all the details of the Weasel's capture. For the immediate present his business was with Alan Stewart. He hunted him up in the handsome office where he nominally transacted business.

There was a strange contrast between the two men—Stewart the fine gentleman to his finger tips, handsome, imperious, and—ineffectual; and Goff, homely, plebeian, careless, and as efficient in his place as a crowbar. It was Goff who spoke, without preliminary, and apparently without special interest.

"You have probably seen the police manifesto in the papers, Mr. Stewart. They claim to have caught the man who killed Maurice. Do you want to accept their statement, and let the matter go at that? I'll drop it here and now, if you say so."

"Yes, I was meaning to telephone you to drop it," Stewart said hastily. Then he looked at Goff, and, as though the other had spoken, he caught himself up and looked again. "Or have you any other idea?" he added doubtfully.

"There's more to it, I think," Goff said indifferently. "The police have accepted a quick and easy solution. Maybe they are right on the main point. I don't know. They don't know. That's the point—they *don't* know. But there is something about the case that their answer does not meet. If you want me to go on and find out what the whole answer is, I'll do it. I don't say it will be a different answer. But it will be a broader one than the police are content with."

"If the police are framing up something," Stewart sputtered, his self-esteem flaming up into ready wrath.

"No. I don't mean that. They think they've got the right man. The things they haven't considered are outside of their field—not criminal. But if you want to know all the facts connected with that night, I might go a little further. Just as you say."

Stewart considered, pursing his lips with the nervous indecision of an irritable man.

"If that Doctor Archer is involved," he burst out at last, "I'd like mighty well to catch him up. He is too damned cocky. You don't think——"

Goff shrugged his shoulders slightly. "I couldn't name any names at this stage, Mr. Stewart. It's only a feeling I have. May be nothing in it. Drop it this minute, if you say so."

Stewart hated to be forced to a decision. Archer's hint that revelations might be unpleasant had haunted his mind. But Archer's suggestion had been an impertinence! His resentment overshadowed his caution.

"Go ahead," he said curtly.

Goff nodded, picked up his shabby hat, and walked off without further words. His way took him to the Condé House.

CHAPTER XI.

At the hospital, Archer learned, through the freemasonry of his profession, that the Weasel had been more seriously hurt than Chief Burke had intimated. It would certainly be some time before he could be brought into court.

Archer had not seen Dane since his conversation with Miss Cheney, and he walked around to Royal Street to discuss this news with him—and, if possible, to get him out. He was trying hard to accept Burke's confident assertion that they had the right man. If the police proved their case against a common sneak thief, there would be no further "investigation." And why shouldn't the police be right? They ought to know.

If only he had not found that ring! But, thank Heaven, that he, and not some one else, had found it!

His ring at Royal Street was answered by the leisurely colored girl known as Nini—short for Virginia. Maurice, who had possessed the complacency of the complete egotist, had asked Marie Donné to secure the necessary cook and housemaid for the Cheney *menage*, and he had neither considered whether the task might not be distasteful to Marie, nor whether Nini might not be more Miss Donné's servant than Miss Cheney's. As a matter of fact, Nini, with the somewhat uncanny intuition of the negro, knew more of what went on behind that gray wall than any one else, and this despite the fact that she "slept out."

"Is Mr. Dane at home?" he asked.

"Misteh Dane is always at home," was the liquid answer. "He's out in the court. Misteh Dane's nerves doan' seem jest right, do they, now, docteh?" In spite of the mask of color which nature had given her and the mask of service which she wore with intermittent success, she looked so smiling and so knowing that Archer gave her a long second look.

"Let him know I am here, please," he said, and turned aside into the drawing-room. Here Mrs. Cheney came to him a moment later. She carefully closed the door.

"These darkies are all ears," she said, with the smiling despair of the Northern woman in dealing with the colored "help" of the South. "Really, I feel as though I had no privacy. I am so thankful you have come, Doctor Archer. I was praying you might drop in this afternoon."

"I hope Dane is not worse."

"He says he is all right. He was very annoyed at my suggesting that I send for you. But he *isn't* like himself, doctor."

"I'll go out and talk to him. He probably needs cheerful conversation more than drugs, for that matter."

"He is out in the courtyard—seems to like it there. May I come out and join you a little later?" She glanced wistfully out through the open door to where Neal's chair could be seen under a dwarf palm.

"Do, Mrs. Cheney. This is not a professional call."

"I'll give you a few minutes alone with him," she said, with determined self-restraint. She stood by the door watching as he walked out to Neal.

Dane heard his step, and lifted himself up in his lounge chair with a quick, nervous gesture.

"Oh, it's you!" he said quickly. "Thank Heaven! Sit down and talk to me."

"That's what I came for," Archer answered, with his quiet smile. "How pleasant it is out here! When I looked at your cold-gray wall from outside, I was bent on getting you to take your family and flee forthwith to some hideous but modern apartment on the other side of town. But now that I see you 'with yourself,' I think better of it."

There was some professional guile in this approach to the question, yet the place really was attractive. The little court, embraced on two sides by the right-angled walls of the house and on the other two sides by its high, gray wall, was, in fact, an all-sufficient justification for the love of seclusion which the old Creoles had brought over from their French ancestry. A fountain in the center of the court played over the feet of a marble nymph who must have come from France in the days when Nouvelle Orléans was in the heart of an American wilderness.

Flowers bloomed gayly at the foot of the wall, roses climbed up the side of the house, which itself blossomed into balconies of delicate filigree below windows that would have delighted an artist, and oleander and dwarf palm gave a fragrant and pleasant shade for the group of garden chairs that clustered about a rustic table. Dane watched Archer as he took it all in, and a mischievous smile flickered across his face.

"You couldn't get me away with a crowbar," he said composedly. "I like this idea of a private moat and drawbridge, or things to that effect. I'm never going out into the world. This jolly old place just suits me."

"Still—jolly isn't exactly the word," demurred Archer, his eyes coming back to Dane. He thought the boy looked more drawn in this glare of light than he had realized before, yet perfectly normal and self-possessed. There was no sign of hysteria about him.

"I don't mean that kind of jolly. I mean ripping. Old place might be full of ghosts. Do you believe in ghosts?" Dane asked, with sudden curiosity and a sidelong glance.

"I have never seen one," Archer answered.

"H-m-m. Perhaps you never invited one. However, this place suits me down to the ground. Does mother know you are here?"

"Yes. I spoke to her inside. She is coming out presently. I thought you would be interested to know that I have been interviewing Chief of Police Burke in regard to this man they have arrested for the murder of Maurice. I see you have the extra there."

Dane lay back in his chair with his unsmiling eyes fixed upon Archer. His face was as expressionless as though it had been cast in white metal.

"Yes."

"He resisted arrest, was shot, and rather seriously wounded. He is out at the City Hospital, under guard."

Dane pulled himself up. The rigidity of his face seemed broken.

"Will he die?"

"It is too soon to say."

"What makes them think that he is the right man?"

"They have recovered some of the things that were stolen from the Condé House that night. And then—his record."

Dane looked a question.

"He is an escaped convict, already under a life sentence for killing a policeman in trying to escape arrest once before," said Archer.

As he spoke Mrs. Cheney came down the three steps leading into the court. Dane greeted her with a laugh of nervous excitement that made her smile.

"Dear, you are looking better!" she said. She put her hand caressingly on Dane's forehead, and Archer was glad to see the boy place his own upon it, in answer, instead of shaking it off. "I am going to have that funny Nini bring the tea out here. You will have a cup of tea with us, won't you, Doctor Archer?"

"Thank you, I shall be delighted."

"I don't suppose that Alice will come?" Dane said, with a questioning look at his mother.

"I think not, dear."

"But why not?" he demanded insistently and almost angrily. "If Alice knew what Archer and I know about Maurice, she would spend these days in praise and thanksgiving, instead of weeping——"

"I don't think she is weeping."

"Then why doesn't she join us?"

"Dear! You must realize that Alice needs some time to adjust herself, even if she——"

"Even if she didn't love him? Is that what you were going to say?" Dane asked acutely.

"Neal! Isn't it enough that he is dead?"

Neal laughed shortly. "Of course. But it somehow makes me furious to think of her mourning over that unspeakable cur!"

"Hush, dear!" She put her fingers soothingly on his wrist, with a warning glance toward the house.

Archer was thankful to see Nini come down the steps at that moment. The others seemed to have forgotten him, or accepted him, to a degree that was almost embarrassing. Nini was carrying a laden tray, and was followed by Rosa, the cook, carrying another. They laughed as they came, like a harvest-home processional, bearing the fruits of the earth. This was to them no formal service of convention. They were taking part in a dramatic presentation of good cheer and hospitality.

"Oh, I shall love it here!" said Mrs. Cheney, after she had dismissed the maids. "Things are beginning to seem like old times, before Alice was engaged——"

"To a man she didn't know!"

"And before you went away. The darkies are certainly shiftless, but so cheerful! And the house is so quaint! Alice will be interested in it a"——"

"When she comes back to life!"

"Neal! You must not talk like that. You must—just get well!"

Neal laughed. "Don't you see how much better I am already?"

"You *are* better. If we could only bribe Doctor Archer to stay!"

"Oh, I'll stay, never fear!" Archer said. He spoke gayly, but Dane turned and gave him a rather curious look.

Archer took the first possible opportunity to get away, in spite of the completeness of their acceptance of him in their conversation. He had a feeling that Alice Cheney might perhaps come out into the sunshine, if she knew there was no stranger there. Neal rose when Archer made his adieus to Mrs. Cheney.

"You don't have to go through the house," he said. "There's a gate in the garden wall that opens on the street. You don't know how protected this place makes one feel. I can imagine myself a Creole beauty of the last century—or a modern 'Man in the Iron Mask,' living here hidden for years!"

"You'd better stir beyond the wall occasionally, my imaginative friend, or you won't have enough exercise."

"I don't want exercise. Had enough of that to last me the next three years."

"Do you know that you are not far from the house that was prepared to receive Napoleon, when his friends were planning to rescue him from St. Helena?" Archer asked craftily. "Get your hat, and I'll show you the place. It was a very skillfully managed plot, but Napoleon spoiled it by dying."

"Not to-day, thank you," said Dane dryly. "See, here is my own special and private portcullis." He unlocked a gate in the gray wall that opened directly upon the street.

Archer, still smiling, stepped out, while Dane stood hospitably in the open gateway. A man and a woman who were walking along the narrow banquette checked their slow pace to give Archer room. The man was tall, lanky, weary-looking, with deep-set eyes very close together. As for the girl, Archer just had sufficient presence of mind to refrain from raising his hat. It was Marie Donné. She was not looking at him, however. Her eyes were fixed with a passionate though momentary intensity upon Dane. Then she walked on, and her escort followed.

Dane had stepped backward quickly. His face was flushed and a nervous laugh shook his voice.

"These houses are right on the street!" he said. "You're—you're awfully near to people."

CHAPTER XII.

"Well?" said Goff, as soon as they had passed the gate. He bent an observant eye upon his companion. "Have you seen either of those men before?"

Marie Donné was shivering with a nervous tremor that made it hard for her to speak collectedly. She made the effort with obvious difficulty.

"He was there that night!" The look she lifted to Goff was both frightened and amazed.

"Which one?"

"The young one—the slender one. The—the host."

"Did you notice the one who was leaving?"

"No. That is, I saw he was a stranger. I do not know him. But the other!"

"He was at the Condé House the night that Maurice was killed?"

"Yes. He went upstairs. He asked——" She seemed in a mist of recollections that made her stumble. Goff watched her, and when he spoke there was a quiet undertone in his voice that steadied her.

"He didn't register as a guest, of course?"

"No. He did not want a room. He wanted to see—some one. Some one he thought was there. He came in late."

"Midnight?"

"Oh, no. It was just as I came in from my aunt's, where I had been for the evening—just a little after ten, I think. The crowd was just coming back from Canal Street. I hadn't yet taken off my hat. He asked for some one—I can't remember the name. Doctor Something."

"Doctor Archer?"

"Yes, that was the name! How did you know?"

"Was Doctor Archer at the Condé House at any time?"

"No. I told the young man so. He was impatient, and said he had seen Doctor Archer at the window. I said we had no guest by that name, and turned away from him."

"You were alone in the office?"

"Yes. My mother was in the kitchen. You understand that it is difficult to keep the servants in when there is a fête. I went to hunt up Juliette and send her to the café. When I went back to the office I saw the young man who had been so insistent coming down the front stairs. He had gone upstairs without heeding my assurance."

"You are certain that it was this young man we saw at the gate?"

"I cannot doubt it for a moment."

"You did not mention this to the police?"

"It went out of my mind till I saw him."

"How long was he upstairs?"

"It might be—ten minutes."

Goff mused silently. "One would have been enough, if he knew Maurice was there—if he had a motive. But why did he ask for Doctor Archer? Why not use a fictitious name, if all he wanted was an excuse? Why involve a friend?" He turned to Marie. "Doctor Archer was never at your house at all?"

"No. I have a memory for names. But what of all this, Mr. Goff? I heard the shot that killed the captain, and it was long after that young man had run down the stairs and out into the street. An hour later, at least."

Goff took this in, in meditative silence. With his habitual air of listlessness he turned seemingly to another point.

"The other man we passed just now—the caller who was leaving. You have not seen him before?"

"No."

"Yet he had seen you. He recognized you—and then tried to conceal his knowledge."

"Yes?" said Marie inattentively. "Then you know him?"

Goff's eyes were on the ground, and his meditative answer was more for himself than for her. "That was Doctor Archer—the man for whom Dane inquired at the Condé House, the man who tried to discourage Stewart from starting an investigation, the man who made it his business to call immediately on Chief Burke, and who was sufficiently interested to go out to the City Hospital to learn of the condition of the Weasel. And he has seen Miss Donné before, and identified her now at sight!"

Miss Donné looked as though she were trying to follow a series of remarks in a foreign tongue.

"I don't understand," she said.

"Neither do I, Miss Donné. If I did, there wouldn't be any case. But there is a connection, and sooner or later I shall see it, and then I think I'll have an answer to our question. Miss Donné, I don't suppose you know anything about the household staff at that house?"

"Mrs. Cheney's? Yes, I supplied the two women there—Rose, the cook, and the maid Nini." As usual, Miss Donné answered clearly and definitely, and, as usual, she left an impression of having withheld the kernel of her own thought.

"Then, if you told Nini to answer any questions I may ask, she would probably do so?" Goff suggested softly.

"I suppose so." It was a grudging admission.

"Then please tell her to do so," said Goff. He snapped it out like an order, and left her abruptly without further words.

He walked back to his office with his head bent, but when he had closed the door he began walking up and down the room alertly and talking aloud to himself, as though he were presenting the case to a partner.

"Miss Cheney talked with that man at the ball. If it was not Maurice—and I am fairly certain it wasn't—why hasn't she said something about it? Does she connect that fact with the murder? Is she protecting the unknown man?"

He considered the point, but shook his head as if in doubt.

"Dane was at the Condé House. Doctor Archer may have been there, since Dane asked for him. Is either of those men in love with Miss Cheney? Dane is no blood relation, though Stewart called him her brother. Those two men came to town on Monday, and Maurice is killed Monday night. Now, assuming that one of those men wants the girl, we have motive and opportunity centering on one man. And if the same man personated Maurice at the ball, the other indications are confirmed and strengthened by Miss Cheney's silence. *Three* points centering on one man. I must see those people together and put a little pressure on them. Here's where Nini will be a help."

He nodded his head and ended the consultation with himself.

Nini was, indeed, of material assistance in arranging the setting for the next act. Goff had to wait several days before the conditions were all favorable, but one afternoon he received the signal which announced that the four persons he wanted to study together were assembled in the courtyard behind the gray wall. He crossed quickly to the house, told Nini to announce him by name, and followed her so closely into the court that there was no opportunity for any one to slip away, if any one had had a thought of doing so. There was no indication of any such desire, however. The four pairs of eyes turned to meet him, as he approached, were politely attentive, and neither fearful nor hostile.

He bowed with stiff formality to the group, and spoke with a deliberate slowness which gave him the opportunity to observe the countenances of all of them as he proceeded.

"Goff is the name. You probably don't know of me, being, as I understand it, all strangers to New Orleans. But I am a detective. Private. Not connected with the police department. Mr. Stewart did me the honor to engage me the other day to make an investigation in which, I believe, you are interested."

At this Dane rose to his feet and pulled a garden chair forward. "Oh, yes, I understand. Take a chair. Mr. Stewart did say something the other day about engaging a detective, but I didn't know he had gone ahead and done it. Let me introduce our-

selves—unless it isn't necessary? Perhaps by the mysterious arts of your profession you know all about us already, Mr. Goff!"

Goff met his smiling inquiry with a deprecatory gesture.

"No? Then let me begin with myself. I am Neal Dane, very much at your service, now or in the future. This is my mother, Mrs. Cheney, who thinks that having a detective walk into our garden is merely a preliminary step to having us all carted off to the police station. This is my stepsister, Miss Cheney. And this is our friend, Doctor Archer, who would maintain that same air of serene detachment if he knew you had a warrant for his arrest in your pocket. Now, what can we tell you, Mr. Goff?"

Goff bowed formally and unsmilingly to each before he took the chair Dane had indicated.

"It is from Miss Cheney that I hope to get some help," he said in the hesitating manner which so completely belied his close attention. His eyes did not turn to Miss Cheney. They rested with absent-minded dreaminess on Dane.

Dane frowned with quick annoyance. "Can't we leave my sister out of this?" he snapped.

Goff's gaze turned slowly from Dane to Archer and back again, imperturbably calm. "I'm afraid not," he said deliberately. "That is, of course, if she is willing to answer."

Dane turned quickly to Alice. "You don't have to answer any questions unless you want to, Alice," he said. "You've had enough of this." There was a vibrant poignancy in his tone that betrayed more than the annoyance of a brother. And the look he bent upon her was even more revealing than the quiver in his voice. A man does not give that look to a woman unless he loves her.

Goff let his eyes fall with an inaudible sigh. It was what he had expected to discover, and yet he was almost sorry now that doubt was removed.

"I should at least like to know what questions Mr. Goff wishes to ask," Alice Cheney said quietly.

"Thank you, Miss Cheney. I understand that you attended the ball on Monday night."

"Yes."

"And that you danced with one of the maskers."

"Yes."

"Do you know who he was?"

"No."

If the readiness with which his question was answered was a surprise to Goff, he betrayed the fact only by a momentary hesitation and the steadiness of his regard before he went on.

"It was not Mr. Maurice, then?"

"It was not. At first I took for granted that it was Mr. Maurice, but as soon as he spoke to me I knew it was not."

"But he knew you? You were called out by name?"

"Yes."

"Do you mind telling me what he said to you, Miss Cheney?"

Alice hesitated perceptibly at this, and a slow flush mounted embarrassingly to her face. Dane turned toward Goff aggressively.

"That can hardly be necessary for your purposes, Mr. Goff."

Goff answered deprecatingly. "Miss Cheney says that this stranger appeared in Maurice's costume and place——"

"She said nothing of the sort.

Goff coughed apologetically. "I beg pardon, Miss Cheney, but I understood——"

"He wore a costume similar to the one Mr. Maurice told me he should wear," Alice said quietly. "That was why I took for granted at first it was he. But with his first words, almost, he told me that Mr. Maurice —would not be there."

"Did he say why?"

"Yes. He said that Mr. Maurice was—intoxicated." She kept her voice even, but evidently with an effort.

Dane fidgeted, but Goff went on obliviously.

"Can you recall his exact words, Miss Cheney? They may, perhaps, be important."

"I had asked him why Mr. Maurice was not there. He said, 'He is lying, dead drunk, across the bed in his room at the Condé House.' "

Inside of his cuff, Goff snapped his fingers in silent triumph. Aloud he merely said, in a matter-of-fact manner, "This was the first dance?"

"Yes."

"That will enable us to fix the time. Did you finish the dance with him, Miss Cheney?"

"Yes."

"What did he talk about, after he had explained Maurice's absence?"

Alice flushed suddenly, and the consciousness that she was blushing made her answer with increased formality.

"It can hardly be necessary for me to repeat his conversation."

"It is important for us to identify him, if possible," Goff intimated quietly.

"He said nothing about himself—that is, nothing identifying."

"Did he make love to you?" Goff asked bluntly.

Dane was on his feet in an instant. His thin face was furious.

"This goes beyond tolerance. The man is dead, and the police have the affair in hand. You have no right to come here to harass and insult my sister!"

"I certainly meant no insult to Miss Cheney in assuming that the man who danced with her might have been in love with her," Goff answered, with disarming composure. "I have no doubt that many men have been ready to fall in love with so much charm. *Did* he make love, Miss Cheney?"

Alice had recovered her composure. "He paid me the usual compliments which a man pays a woman in the dance," she said quietly. Her glance toward Dane was plainly a warning.

Without turning his head Goff shifted his eyes to Dane. "Where were you that evening, Mr. Dane? At the ball?"

"No. I was in the street. Watching the parade—and the crowds." The slight sullenness that marked his tone might have been simply the aftermath of the temper he had betrayed.

"Did you happen to see Captain Maurice at any time during the evening?"

Dane's temper threatened to flare up again. "How could I see him when I was in the streets, as I told you, and he was drunk in the Condé House?"

"How do you know that he was drunk in the Condé House?"

Dane obviously checked himself to reconsider. "Didn't that johnnie—whoever he was—tell my sister so?" he threw out.

"I should not consider his word conclusive," said Goff. "He was an impostor, by his own confession. Possibly a thief. Possibly a murderer." Goff's mild gaze drifted across the faces before him as though he were looking for confirmation or support.

Mrs. Cheney sat as motionless as a bird fascinated by a snake, her bright eyes fastened on Goff as though she were hypnotized. There was always something birdlike about her, and, while it usually took the form of flutterings and twitterings, at that moment she could neither have moved or spoken to save her life. Goff's gaze passed from her to Miss Cheney. She was agitated, but was plainly making a strong effort to control any evidence of that fact. Unconsciously she had turned in her chair toward Neal.

"The mother knows nothing. She is merely frightened on general principles," thought Goff. "The sister knows something about Dane that she is afraid I shall discover." He turned toward her with a deprecating gentleness that was at once an apology and a reassurance.

"Do you think, Miss Cheney, that you would know the voice of the man who danced with you, if you should hear it again?"

"If he whispered, I might," Alice said slowly. "He spoke only in a whisper."

"Ah! Then clearly he thought you would recognize his voice if he spoke naturally! Did he appear self-possessed, or nervous?"

"Very self-possessed. Almost debonair!"

Goff smiled. "Nothing on his mind! And you came home immediately after that dance?"

"No, I joined my mother upstairs and we watched the second dance through. After that we came home."

"That would be about eleven o'clock."

"Yes, just about eleven."

"And your brother came in—when?"

"I'll answer for myself about my movements," Dane interrupted. He was smoking jerkily, and he puffed a cloud over his head before he continued. "After watching the parade I walked around by the opera house, intending to go in and look up my mother and sister—Maurice had given me a ticket of admission. But being on my feet for two hours had used me up. I had had a bad turn on the train in the afternoon, as Doctor Archer knows, and was not feeling very fit. So I came home instead, let myself in, and went to bed. There was no one in the house—it was just ten o'clock. I dropped into a heavy sleep—so heavy I did not hear the others come in. I woke with a start about midnight, and saw from my window that there was a light shining into the court from Alice's room. From that I knew she and mother were in, and I went to sleep again, and that is the last I know

until mother came into my room in the morning and brought in the paper."

Dane's manner was so natural, his story so simple and credible, that Archer breathed a sigh of relief. Then he glanced at Alice and met her eye. He had the presence of mind to stumble immediately against a potted plant and upset it, and he emphasized the momentary confusion that followed by laughing at his own clumsiness. But he had an uncomfortable suspicion that Goff, too, had seen that look of horrified dismay on Miss Cheney's face, and that Goff had not been diverted by the accident. Goff paid so little attention, indeed, to the overturned plant that Archer felt he had probably made things worse by too obvious an attempt to distract his attention. He deliberately drew the discussion into his own hands. He might be able to do something to minimize the significance of that unconscious denial of Dane's story given by Miss Cheney's transparent countenance.

"The disappearance of Maurice's scarfpin seems to me very significant," he said. "That argues a thief. You can't get away from that."

"Burke can't," said Goff with a smile. "He builds his case against the Weasel on that one fact. But who knows *when* the pin was torn from his scarf? The fact that neither his purse nor his watch was taken throws doubt on the theory that the murderer was merely a thief at bay."

He spoke carelessly, but Archer had come to distrust Goff's seemingly negligent manner. He suspected that beneath it lay a very sharp mind, and one accustomed to dealing in subtleties. He addressed himself to that suspected, though hidden, side of the man.

"Have you considered the possibility that the front room, which was supposed to be empty, may have been occupied?" he asked coolly. "Suppose that some enemy of Maurice's was in that room, waiting for his return—or for an opportunity, if you believe that Maurice did not go to the ball. Such a tenant might have killed him at any convenient hour during the evening, and then made his escape."

"Without being seen?"

"If I am not mistaken, there is a fire escape across the front of the house!"

Goff pinched his nose thoughtfully and looked hard at Archer. His glance flickered without seeming to pause on the red scar that ran slantwise across three fingers of his left hand.

"Miss Donné says that front room was not let," he remarked.

"Does Miss Donné let all the rooms? What happens when she is out? Have you quizzed the old lady?"

"There may be something in that. Thank you for the suggestion, Doctor Archer." And as though he would follow up the suggestion at once, he rose and bowed inclusively. "I thank you all for your help."

Dane pulled himself up from his lounge chair. "I'll see you out," he said pleasantly, bent on maintaining his position as host.

The two walked up to the house, and Mrs. Cheney, who had been sitting as still as a limed bird, started to her feet and drew a deep breath.

"What an awful man!" she breathed, and fluttered up the walk, for all the world like a mother hen watching a hawk carry off a chick.

Archer turned and looked at Alice. In spite of the revelation which had flashed from eye to eye at that crucial moment in Goff's questioning, the girl made an instinctive effort to retreat again behind the protective shelter of silence. It was the physician in Archer which refused to permit her escape. He felt that she could no longer stand things alone.

"You poor child!" he said gently.

The tears welled into her eyes and flowed over, as they will in a child's, and she looked at him through them and unconscious of them.

"What—do you mean?" she begged, frightened and defensive.

"You are troubled because Neal hid the truth about his return that night," he said quietly.

"You know that he did?"

"Yes, I saw that in your face."

"I am sorry. I did not mean to show it." She looked troubled. And then a deeper trouble drove her on. "But why should he hide it? I can't understand—so many things! I can't believe that—that —— Oh, Neal has always been such a dear boy!"

"He is still," Archer said quickly. "He never could be anything else. Don't think of him in any other light, ever."

"But *what* is he hiding? Does he know something about this terrible affair that he can't tell. Why doesn't he tell everything?"

"Have you talked with him about it?"

"He won't talk. He puts me off. But I know he thinks of it all the time. I can see it. And when I remember how he talked in his sleep—— Oh, I have been terrified that some servant or nurse might hear him talk like that again. They couldn't help but think——" She checked her breathless speech and struggled for composure as a fainting swimmer struggles to reach land. "I am ashamed to be so upset, but I have been terribly worried about Neal!"

"Remember that Neal is a sick man," said Archer urgently. "I don't mean merely that he has this or that the matter with him —though I could name enough! But his whole organism is thrown out of alignment, in a fashion. You can't argue from his words or actions as you could from a normal person's. You mustn't draw conclusions. Just disregard things that seem unaccountable. A sick man isn't accountable."

She listened to his words with a pathetic desire to find comfort in them. "Then you think—you don't think it possible——"

"I don't think you need let your heart be troubled," he said, with the smiling disingenuousness of the physician. "Neal will be all right when he is well. These things that have troubled you are merely symptoms of his condition. They are external and accidental, and have nothing to do with the real Neal."

She drew a deep breath of relief. "I don't know what we should have done without you," she said, with straightforward simplicity. "I shall never be able to thank you."

"Some time I'll have a favor to ask, and I'll remind you," he laughed.

But after he had left her, he went over his professional arguments carefully, with a view to the influence he might be able to exert on a jury. It might not be easy to persuade twelve disinterested men that Neal Dane was not to be regarded as accountable for his acts that night. That he plainly saw.

CHAPTER XIII.

Nini watched Goff's departure from behind the edge of a half-closed door. She had expected to let him out herself, and to use the opportunity for a word aside, but Dane accompanied him to the door, and that hampered her. However, Nini possessed in full the negro's dramatic instinct, and the fact that she had been consulted in regard to this interview gave her assurance. She slipped a market basket on her arm, cut around through back alleys, and so came face to face with Goff before he had gone two blocks from the walled house.

"Howdy, Mistuh Goff," she said, stopping with smiling confidence in his path. "Yuh lak to know sumthin'?"

Goff had lived long enough in the South to know where negro presumption begins and where it ends, but personally he was too indifferent to the ordinary conventions of society to care what any one might think, and professionally he was ready to use any tool that offered itself for his purposes. He gave Nini a slow, considering look that somewhat embarrassed her.

"Maybe," he said laconically. "What is it?"

"They is askin' questions about thet they sca'fpin what Mistuh Maurice had in his sca'f when he was killt. I kin tell yuh whe' it is now!"

"Where is it?" Goff asked negligently.

"Miss Marie got it!" flashed Nini with a toss of her head and a smile of anticipation. She expected her communication to produce a dramatic effect, but in this she was disappointed. Goff simply looked at her with that slow, considering look, which might hide satirical amusement as well as a gratifying astonishment.

"You think so?" he said softly.

"I is tellin' yuh!"

"I didn't know Miss Marie had told you about that."

"She ain't *tole* me," Nini said, resentful of his ostentatious nonchalance. "She ain't tole nobody. I done see it."

"Oh, yes, I understand. You saw the pin in her room before she gave it to me, I suppose. They found it on the floor, and she wants me to return it to Mr. Stewart."

Nini tossed her head. "You think yuh sma't. Miss Marie ain't gwine return thet pin to nobody. She gwine keep it fo' a keepsake. Ain't she got a right? She is *giv* thet pin to Mistuh Maurice her ownself!"

"How do you know that?" he asked, condescending to directness for once. Here was unexpected confirmation of one guess of his.

"Ain't I got eyes? Ain't I Miss Marie's gal? Doan't I know what she keep in her hankcher box? Huh!"

A gleam of admiration lighted up Goff's evasive eyes.

"So you knew that Miss Donné and Mr. Maurice were old sweethearts?"

"Law sakes, ain't I see 'em? Miss Marie was plumb mad enough to pull out her hair when Mistuh Maurice went sweetheartin' on Miss Cheney. But Miss Marie plumb fool herself ef she think she get him back with a present of a pin. A pin got a p'int to it!"

Goff shook his head seriously. "No, Nini. That was just a good-by present. She wasn't trying to get him back."

"Mebbe," Nini yielded readily. "Misteh Goff, they's sompin' funny about Misteh Dane. He won't go out in de street on no 'count."

"He isn't strong enough," said Goff. But he smiled.

"Law sakes, he plenty strong enough," she scoffed.

"He's afraid," said Goff. He did not smile this time, and he watched her. But again Nini repudiated the suggestion.

"No, sah! He ain't 'fraid. He ain't 'fraid o' nuthin', Misteh Dane ain't. 'Tain't that."

"Then he's lazy," Goff suggested softly. But Nini was difficult. She shook her head and drew a step nearer.

"It look lak voodoo to me," she said with a nervous giggle, showing the whites of her eyes. "He think he *cain't* go out de do'. He think he see locks whe' they ain't no locks!" Her dramatic tone and gesture gave one vividly the idea of self-imprisonment by illusion.

Goff looked at her so hard that she felt he was looking through her, and shivered nervously, but at the end he lifted his shoulders in careless disregard of her report.

"Nothing in that, Nini. Doctor Archer told him to stay inside and keep quiet," he said calmly, and walked on his deliberate way. Nini glowered after him with a dissatisfied feeling that her surprises had fallen flat.

"Huh! He try to mak' me think he know!" she said scornfully, and turned back to the walled house without filling her basket.

But Goff was not so indifferent as he seemed. He turned the new fact—for he never doubted Nini's statement—over and over in his mind as he walked on to the Condé House.

"That eliminates the Weasel," he said to himself. "Whether Maurice gave the pin back to Marie—and he may have done so—or whether she took it from him when she found him dead, it eliminates the Weasel. The police have nothing to go on, if Marie has the scarfpin. Of course, the Weasel was in the house that night, by the other things discovered on him, and there is the barest possibility that Maurice saw him and was sober enough to show fight. But—I—don't—believe it!" He mused, with his head bent and his eyes on the ground till he reached the Condé House.

Handsome Marie Donné was at her desk in the tiny office, working at her books with swiftness and attention. She looked a little more set than when Goff had interviewed her before. It was as though a grayness had fallen upon her body and her spirit. With the clear-sightedness of her French inheritance, she had faced the facts of her life and adjusted herself accordingly. Goff's slow glance took all this in, with an understanding one would hardly have expected of him. "She never looked like this before. And she will never look like anything else now as long as she lives," he said to himself.

"Miss Donné, I want to ask you some further questions about the events of that Monday night," he said, with grave directness. "I am sorry to refer to a painful subject——"

She lifted her head proudly and eyed him coldly. "I have already told you what I remember of the events of that evening," she said.

"And I have not forgotten. But it has become a matter of importance to determine the time of those events as closely as possible, and that was a matter we did not dwell upon before. For instance, can you fix the time when that young man you identified went upstairs?"

"He came and he went long before Mr. Maurice entered the house. Is not that enough?"

"Assume that I have some other reason for asking. Believe me, Miss Donné, I have good reasons for asking certain questions. I wish to use your knowledge to check certain other statements. I know you to be observant and exact."

"I am habitually exact," she said coldly. She knitted her brows, unwilling to recede from her position, but though Marie Donné had a strong will, Goff's silence covered a will that was implacable. She yielded.

"I left the office that evening at half past seven. It is my custom to leave a little

earlier, but I was detained by several persons who came in asking for rooms which I could not give them."

"Did you notice any of these persons?" Goff asked. He spoke sharply, for him.

"No. I merely told them the house was full. They left at that. I spent two hours with my aunt, and then walked back from Rampart Street. I had intended to spend the night with her but it proved unnecessary. It was immediately after I came in that the young man entered and asked if Doctor Archer was not staying here. I said no."

"What was his manner?" Goff interrupted. "Was he excited?"

"No. It was the manner of a willful boy who will not be contradicted. He turned on his heel and left, and I thought he went into the street. But it appears that in the hall he must have turned back, for when I came back from arranging for service in the café, he was coming down the front stairs."

"That would bring it very near to half past ten."

"Yes. It was just about that."

Goff reflected silently, "Young Dane was careful to say that he was at home by ten, but his sister's face gave his statement the lie—and Archer saw it." To Marie he said:

"Did you see Maurice when he entered? Can you fix the time?"

"It was about half an hour later—just eleven. He went up the stairs to his room without stopping to speak to me."

"Then he had a room here?"

"The front room was always kept in reserve for him."

"The front room? I understood——"

"The front room was locked and he had not stopped for the key. Therefore, I followed him a few minutes later. While I was on the stairs I heard the shot."

"Did you recognize it as a shot?"

"Yes, but I was not certain for a moment that it was inside the house. By this time the streets were full of people going homeward, and there was a great deal of noise—singing, whistles, all sorts of noise. I thought the shot might have been in the street. But when I got upstairs, and found the front door still locked, I tried the adjoining room. Maurice was on the bed, dead." She stopped abruptly.

"What did you do then?"

She did not answer for a moment, and Goff's quiet eyes rested on her, unhurried but implacable. She answered almost mechanically.

"I lost consciousness. I am not in the habit of fainting, but then I fainted, for when I next knew myself I was lying on the rug on the floor beside the bed. I felt—very ill. Then I heard the sound of voices in the hall, and the slamming of doors, and I pulled myself up by holding on to the bed. Some of our guests had come home from the parade and had found that their rooms had been robbed in their absence. I did not know this at first, of course. I stood by the bed, looking at Maurice, until I heard a knocking at the door. It was one of the maids hunting for me. I went downstairs and telephoned to the police station. It was twenty-five minutes after eleven." She stopped, as though she had come to the end of all things.

Both were silent for a moment, Marie with her eyes bent on vacancy, the man with his shrouded eyes bent on her. Then he spoke abruptly.

"Did you notice whether Maurice was wearing a scarfpin?"

"He was not."

"You took note?"

"I took note."

For a minute their eyes locked in a trial of strength, and Goff recognized that at last he had touched the fundamental power against which his will was powerless. He turned aside.

"Do you accept the police theory that some marauder in the hotel robbed and shot him?"

"He was not robbed. I do not know who shot him. I have no theory." She lifted her shoulders in a protest of weariness.

Goff rose. "Thank you, Miss Donné. You have made several points clear to me. By the way, I'd like to speak to your mother about the robbery in the hotel—who first raised the alarm and just what happened elsewhere while you were in that room. I'll look her up—don't disturb yourself."

Marie drew her eyebrows together, but more, it seemed, in scorn of her mother's ability to add anything of importance to the subject than from any objection.

"I think I can tell you everything necessary."

"But you were unconscious for some minutes. I always make a point of getting first-hand evidence, if possible. Let me have my

way, Miss Donné." He spent one of his rare smiles upon her as he bowed, and left the office. With quiet assurance he made his way out into the back regions where his alert eye had seen Mrs. Donné pass through the swinging door.

"I want a word with you by yourself," he said to her in an authoritative undertone. "I am a detective, investigating the Maurice murder."

Mrs. Donné blinked nervously, and without answering she led him to a small, vacant dining room out of sight of Marie's office. She closed the door and waited for him to speak, with a look of mingled apprehension and defiance.

"I told Miss Marie that I wanted to ask you something about the guests who were robbed the night that Maurice was killed," he said, in a confidential tone, "but what I really want to know is what you can tell me about the man who took the front room that evening—the man who did not register, and whom Marie knows nothing about. He came in while Marie was out. Was it soon after she left?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Donné. How could she deny it, if he already knew?

"Did he have any baggage?"

"No. He paid for the night." Then her old bitterness broke into words. "Why should I let money slip through my fingers while the room stood empty?"

"That's right. You did the sensible thing. Did you see him when he went out?"

"No. He must have worn the devil's cloak. He never went out, and yet the room was empty when I unlocked it."

"When did you unlock it?"

"That night—after the hubbub—while Marie was talking to the police. You understand, monsieur, these American children——" She shrugged significantly.

"I understand. It is not necessary to tell Marie everything. You let the room for one night only, and you saw the man go in, but you did not see him go out. Yet he was gone, and the doors locked, at half past eleven. Mrs. Donné, would you know that man if you saw him again?"

She shook her head with a grim look. Clearly she was not going to be dragged into a position where she would be forced to acknowledge before Marie her covert action in renting the room. Goff understood.

"You were wise to keep this matter to yourself. Continue to do so. If this man is to be identified, it must be through me, you understand, not through you. I do not wish you to appear in the matter. But you can help me without having your name come into the inquiry in any way. You saw his hands. There was a scar. Tell me about it. Which hand?"

"The left. A scar that ran slanting across three fingers," she conceded reluctantly.

He nodded. "Just so. Say nothing of this, you understand. Say to Marie that I asked how many of your guests complained of a loss."

She looked relieved. "Yes, yes!"

Goff stopped for a moment at Marie's desk on the way out.

"It was very little your mother could tell me."

"I thought so," was Marie's impatient comment.

Goff went direct to his own office, and let himself into the dingy room in which his character had taken on its peculiar bent. He was as impersonal as a scientist. Human nature was a subject for curious study, but, after all, there wasn't very much variety in its manifestations! Touch the basic springs, and all men reacted in the same way, whatever their culture. He frowned a little to himself, and returned in thought to his specific problem.

"The whole series of events hangs together, and the connection is pretty clear," he reflected. "I think I can see just about what each person must have done. But, of course, Burke would insist on having every i dotted and every t crossed before he would give up his theory for a different solution. Well, if I am not mistaken, Doctor Archer could help me to some of those connecting links, and I think I can make him do it, in spite of his evident bias. I'd better see him."

He pulled the desk telephone to him. "Give me the Monteleone," was his somewhat imperious demand. He was in a masterful mood! Having got his connection, he said:

"I want to speak to Doctor Archer."

It appeared, however, that Doctor Archer was not in, and for the moment Goff was checked. He declined to give his name, and hung up the receiver. He did not wish to put Archer on his guard. But the next morning he tried again, at the earliest hour possible, and was more successful. Archer's voice answered him.

"This is Goff, Doctor Archer. Could you come over to my office for a few minutes?"

There was a momentary wait, but Doctor Archer's voice was level and quiet when he answered.

"Yes, I can come. Where is your office?"

Goff gave directions.

"All right," said Archer. "I'll be there immediately."

His voice sounded heavy, and Goff tapped his desk with a thoughtful tattoo.

"He's going to be on his guard!" he said to himself.

CHAPTER XIV.

Archer obeyed Goff's summons with a heavy heart. It could mean only one thing. Goff's quest had been rewarded with at least some part of the hidden truth. How much had he learned? And what could be done about it? Never in his life had Archer faced a situation with so helpless a feeling.

Goff admitted him to his dingy office, and locked the door behind him. "We don't want to be interrupted," he said in brief explanation. "Smoke, if you want to," he added.

Archer shook his head. "Thank you, no." He waited.

Goff dropped into the chair that was backed to the window, and looked at Archer, who had taken the chair at the other end of the table.

"I want to tell you where I have got in my investigations."

Archer nodded.

"When Mr. Stewart came to me, I thought he was on a wild-goose chase, inspired simply by family pride and his sense of personal importance. The police had a good theory, they were committed to working it out, and I didn't want to antagonize Burke unnecessarily. I went into the matter, therefore, without any enthusiasm, and I expected to tell Stewart within a day or two that there was no justification for his theory that Maurice had been murdered for personal reasons.

"But I had not gone very far before I saw that at least four persons had had the necessary opportunity. One of the four was Judd Weaver, the man suspected by the police. But he was not as likely to prove the murderer, really, as any one of the other three."

He glanced at Archer under his eyebrows, and waited a moment. But Archer had come with the clear determination to give no information to this man if he could help himself. He sat silent and immobile. Goff resumed.

"Let me tell you how I reconstruct the events of that night, Doctor Archer. First, in place of time, you went to the Condé House, and Miss Marie Donné told you the house was full. But she was on the point of leaving, and as soon as she was out of the way her mother assigned you to the front room, taking pay for one night but not requiring you to register.

"While you were in the room, your friend Neal Dane went by and saw you at the window. While you were still in the room, Stewart and Maurice entered the adjoining room. Maurice was very drunk. Stewart left him there. I am satisfied that you found Maurice in a stupor, that you wore his costume and took his place both on the float and at the ball, where you warned Miss Cheney against Maurice. That you could make love to Miss Cheney at the ball, and that she could describe your manner as debonair, satisfies me that, although you had had the opportunity, you had not shot Maurice up to that time."

Again he paused, but Archer was on his guard.

"You had another opportunity, however," Goff continued, as methodically as though he were checking an invoice. "You returned to the Condé House, and restored the costume to Maurice's room, which adjoined your own. While you were there, a shot was heard. It has been assumed that this was the shot that killed Maurice. But that is not necessarily the case. If I believed it was, I should have to believe that you killed him. I suspect that you found him dead, and that the irregularity of your entry into his rooms made you feel the situation to be compromising, and determined you to slip out secretly and say nothing.

"I don't know whether you had the audacity to risk the stairway, or the prudence to take to the fire escape, as you yourself suggested—ah, that was the way, was it? However, that point was not essential. I knew that you were there, and that you had that second clear opportunity to kill the man who stood between you and the woman to whom, half an hour before, you had been making romantic love—assuming, for that argument, that he was still merely drunk when you returned. If that romantic love

affair had been more firmly established, the circumstantial evidence would have weighed rather heavily against you, Doctor Archer!"

He smiled faintly, but Archer would not respond. Goff's voice dropped a little as he resumed.

"Marie Donné is, so far as I know, the only one who claims to have heard that shot. She says that she followed you upstairs—that is, she thinks she followed Maurice upstairs. According to her own story, she was in his room fifteen minutes. She explains the lapse of time by saying that when she saw Maurice dead, she lost consciousness for a time. Marie had a good reason for killing Maurice! A better reason than you had, or than Dane had."

"Good heavens, you wouldn't accuse a woman of murder on nothing stronger than that?" Archer exclaimed in unmistakable horror.

Goff's eyelids flickered for a moment. It was the only sign of triumph which escaped.

"You have been satisfied from the beginning that Dane shot Maurice," he said quietly. "You know something I do not, which has made you practically certain about it. All I know is that Dane saw you at the window early in the evening, that he returned later to inquire for you, and made his way upstairs alone. Maurice's room was unlocked. He was up there for five minutes. Then he rushed out, without speaking to any one, and walked the streets till late in the night, though he said he was at home by ten—a mistake of judgment as well as of fact.

"His sister knew that was a lie, and so did you, and you were so afraid I should notice it that you threw away your own secret about being in the front room of the Condé that evening, in order to distract my attention. Like throwing your child to a pursuing pack of wolves! There is one other fact I know. Dane has been in love with Miss Cheney. He may have thought that with Maurice out of the way, he still stood a chance. She is fond of him, after a fashion. I don't suppose you would gratify a professional man's interest, Doctor Archer, by telling me what significant additional fact is in your possession?"

"I have no intention of telling you anything," said Doctor Archer quietly. Privately he thought there was little need!

"We each withhold something, then," said Goff. "I do not tell you where Maurice's scarfpin is, although I know. The Weasel never had it, by the way. And you will keep to yourself the bit of evidence you found in Maurice's room on your return, when you discovered the body—— Ah!" Again his eyelids flickered down over his sharp eyes.

Archer shook his head with some impatience. "You are going too fast, Mr. Goff. I have no such—knowledge, as you assume. I do know that Dane is a sick man, and that, if you secure his arrest, the chances are that he will die on your hands before he can be brought to trial. The most you can do will be to leave an unproved charge against a dead man, and to overshadow the lives of his mother and sister."

'Those arguments have had weight with you, a friend and a physician," said Goff slowly. "I see that. But you know, as well as I do, that I cannot make this a personal matter. There are certain rules for the game of living that all must regard. I cannot set myself to rewrite the statutes of the land, or the Ten Commandments!"

"After all, you have nothing but inference to go on," said Archer restlessly.

"Inference at the beginning, doubtless, but I can prove each step to the satisfaction of any jury. This isn't a child's game of 'Drop the handkerchief,' Doctor Archer," he added gravely. "It isn't a question of preference. I can sympathize with young Dane, but I have no doubt in my own mind that he shot Maurice."

"Then you intend to report this—theory, to Stewart?"

"I must."

"Why did you ask me to come here? Why did you tell me about it?"

Goff did not look up. "You completed the chain for me. There were some links I had supplied only by guess."

Archer rose. But Goff's voice checked his departure.

"There is another reason. You know, don't you, that Dane keeps himself shut inside that court?"

Archer stared. This man had an uncanny way of discovering things that were not told him.

"All invalids have unreasonable fancies," he said shortly.

"Ah, but this isn't just a whimsey. He has probably reasoned out his course very carefully. It isn't fear. He doesn't know that he is suspected, so he has no reason for fear. It is rather, as I see it, a matter of conscience

—a self-imposed sentence. He is submitting to voluntary imprisonment behind that wall."

Archer bit his lip. There were cases enough on record. It was mortifying that he, a physician, should have had to learn the nature of Dane's phobia from a layman.

"You will have to watch out when Dane learns that Judd Weaver is dead," Goff added, in a matter-of-course manner.

"Judd Weaver? You mean the Weasel? Is he dead?"

"Not yet, I think. But they told me at the City Hospital this morning that he could not live through the day. If Dane carries through this idea of self-imposed punishment——" He lifted his shoulders in a significant gesture, even while he was pulling the desk telephone to him.

Archer let himself out without replying. But before the door closed he heard Goff's quiet voice give a telephone call. He recognized the number. It was Stewart's office.

Archer walked slowly down the stairs, and by the time he had reached the street his mind had rebounded somewhat from the panicky state into which Goff had thrown him. Goff had been very clever, he admitted, to work out the whole pattern from the stray bits of information he had been able to collect, but, after all, he had not *proved* his case. Until Dane admitted the charge, or the Weasel confessed, there must always remain the possibility that the other one was the guilty one! Why the devil didn't the Weasel make a formal confession—since he was dying? That would at least stop Stewart.

The thought at first was just an idle thought—a wish for a solution. He had been headed in the direction of Royal Street, but as he dwelt on the thought he walked more slowly. At last he stopped and turned aside to hail the street car which ran out to the City Hospital.

The freemasonry of the medical profession enabled him to get a frank statement from the interne in charge. Weaver was undoubtedly near the end. He might live another twelve hours, but that was the limit. Accordingly, the police guard, which had been kept over him since he was brought to the hospital, had been reduced to a merely nominal watch of his room.

"Could I speak to him?" Archer asked.

"Of course, if you want to. But I doubt that he will answer."

"Can't he talk?"

"No reason why he couldn't, if he was aroused up to attention. But he is in a lethargic state from which, in all probability, he will never come out."

"Still, I'd like to try."

The interne took Archer to Weaver's bedside, and for a moment the two looked at the unregardful figure in silence. Then the hospital doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"If he has anything to say he'd better be about it," he said bluntly, and left the room.

Archer leaned over the motionless figure, and all the force of his personality was behind his words when he said quietly:

"Weaver! Look at me."

For a minute there was no response. Then Weaver's eyelids slowly lifted, and his wavering eyes seemed to focus with difficulty on the face above him.

"They have accused another man of shooting that fellow at the Condé House. If you did it, you must speak out, to save the other man. It won't hurt you now to come across—it's the square thing to do. Do you understand what I am saying? Shut your eyes, if you do."

Weaver's eyes fluttered in response, and then lifted.

"Did you shoot Maurice that night? Move your hand for yes."

The white hand lying on the coverlet twitched unconsciously, but there was no decisive motion.

"You don't want to send another man to prison in your place," said Archer urgently. "This is your chance to do the square thing."

Weaver's eyes closed slowly, and that was all. Archer spoke to him again, but there was no further response. With a heavy heart he at last gave up his effort as hopeless, and left the hospital. It had been based on a very thin hope at best, nothing stronger than Burke's confident assurance that the Weasel was the guilty man. Archer had earnestly wanted to believe that Burke might be right. This desire had flared up desperately after his interview with Goff. But he saw that he had put the question to the test too late. All he could do now was to stand by Dane as far as that might be possible.

CHAPTER XV.

Archer went back to his hotel, and there he found some correspondence which occupied his attention closely for several hours. Part of it related to his own much-neglected

personal affairs, and there was a long letter from a medical friend detailing a new method of treating neurasthenia which was being tried out in his hospital. It interested him greatly, for he saw at once how the treatment could be applied in Dane's case. Then he sighed, with the realization that Dane's case would soon be beyond him. His common sense had before this revolted at the medical obligation of curing a man in order to hang him.

When he went down to the dining room for a belated luncheon, a newspaper extra edition was lying on the tables. One paragraph made Archer disregard all the rest of the paper. It announced the death, at the City Hospital, of Judd Weaver, charged with the shooting of Leon Maurice.

Weaver must have died very soon after he left the hospital, Archer reflected. Well, it could not affect Dane's case. That would depend on Stewart, and his attitude toward Goff's communication. Recalling Stewart's determination from the beginning to exact his pound of flesh, Archer could not feel that there was much question as to his decision. He would be less impersonal than Goff, but no less set. Curiously enough, while Archer respected Goff for his position, he deeply resented Stewart's.

One thing was intolerable, however, and that was to wait at a distance for the blow to fall. Stewart would probably act at once. Archer waved aside the remainder of his luncheon, and went over to Royal Street. Dane was in the court, as usual, but the feverish look in his eyes was not as usual. The green sheet of the extra lay on the ground beside him.

"Hello!" he said, as Archer came down the walk toward him. "Did you see that Weaver died to-day?" His voice shook in his throat.

"Yes, I saw that item."

"He escapes a trial in that way."

"Yes."

"And—he never answered the charge?"

"There was no opportunity. Burke expected to get a statement from him when he got him back, but, of course, he never had a chance."

Dane lit a new cigarette from the one he had half smoked and threw himself back in his chair. He was watching the smoke wreaths melt into nothing among the leaves overhead when he spoke again.

"I wonder what sort of a chap the Weasel was at bottom."

"Burke gave me an idea," Archer said quietly. "He had spent most of his life in jail. Like most habitual criminals, he was subnormal. He seems never to have had any idea of how to get a living in this world except by stealing. He has undoubtedly committed hundreds of small crimes—and perhaps some large ones—for which he has never paid the legal penalty, simply because he was never found out."

Dane straightened up and eyed his friend with a quizzical glance.

"Is it your idea, then, that if he should now rest under the imputation of a crime which he did not commit, it would only be striking an average?"

"Burke thinks he did commit it," Archer said stoutly.

And then the futility of both argument and evasion was demonstrated by the appearance of Goff.

Nini had admitted him, and he came rapidly down the cement walk to the two men who awaited his approach in silence. An alert look had replaced his customary passivity, and the glance he cast at Archer was almost a smile.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen. I see that I am late in bringing you the news of Weaver's death." He glanced at the paper on the ground.

"Yes, we've seen it," Dane said. "Do take a chair, Mr. Goff, and make yourself at home."

Goff ignored both the chair and Dane's tone.

"I understand that you had an interview with Weaver this morning, Doctor Archer," he said.

"It could hardly be called an interview, since he was incapable of speech. I saw him, however."

"And spoke to him?"

"Yes."

"Have you heard yet that after you left him he roused himself sufficiently to make a deathbed confession of shooting Maurice?"

"No, I hadn't heard. Did he?" Archer had no thought of concealing his excitement.

Goff glanced from him to Dane, who had sunk down in his chair, and whose face was as white as chalk.

"Yes, he really did. It was an effort that took his last ounce of vitality, but he did it.

Burke's case is now complete." Again his eyes dwelt on Archer with that gleam which seemed curiously compounded of amusement and admiration.

"Does Mr. Stewart know?" Archer asked. His blood boiled under the insinuation in Goff's eyes, but he was determined not to let his feelings betray him into expression.

"Mr. Stewart doesn't know anything about —anything. He has been out of town for several days. I have had no opportunity to communicate with him." Then he turned abruptly, and with scarce a nod of farewell he walked out of the court.

"Well!" said Dane. He sat up and looked after Goff with a curious expression. The color was slowly returning to his face. "Our friend, the detective, seems to feel that his job has been taken out of his hands."

"So it would appear," said Archer. "Probably he is disappointed. But I don't see how he can go back of Weaver's statement, if it comes to that."

Dane was looking at him intently. "Did you use your influence to secure Weaver's— confession?" he asked abruptly.

"I urged him to make a statement of the facts," Archer said.

"Why? Why were you interested?"

"Because of Goff," Archer said deliberately.

Dane closed his eyes for a moment and leaned back in his chair.

"I have something to tell you that is more immediately interesting," Archer said, after a pause. "I have been having some correspondence with a friend at Johns Hopkins in regard to a new treatment which is indicated for cases like yours. The results seem very encouraging. I'll read you part of his last letter——"

Dane checked him. "Tell me, in your own language, brought down to words of one syllable."

Archer told him briefly of the new treatment which was making a sensation in medical circles, and Dane listened with a keen intelligence sharpened by his understanding of his own case.

"It has been tried out?"

"It has been tried. Not tried out, but very carefully tried."

"And it works? It is successful?" He was leaning forward with a look on his thin face that touched Archer.

"Yes, so far as there has been time to judge," he said cautiously. "Of course there hasn't been time enough for a convincing test. But it looks most encouraging."

"How much time do you give me, as things stand now?" Dane asked abruptly.

Archer hesitated, with the habitual disinclination of the physician to pronounce sentence on his patient.

"Oh, you don't need to hesitate, or to hunt words to tell me the truth," Dane said, with his quick intuition. "We haven't time to waste on the conventional fibs of the sick room. How long have I to live on this green earth, Doctor Archer?"

"Probably a few months," said Archer quietly.

"And how long, if I take this new treatment, and it works as well in my case as it has in others?"

"You would be put back in the race, with an ordinary mortal's risks and chances. It doesn't make you immune, of course. It merely stops the process of disintegration which has begun. You would probably never be very robust. You would have to be a little more careful than the average man, but you would stand a chance of living out a normal life."

Dane threw his head back again and looked up into the tree with a light that was arresting in his vivid face.

"All right," he said, after a moment. "That's all I want to know. Now I want you to promise me something."

"What is it?"

"Don't tell my mother or Alice about this discovery."

"You want to guard them against a possible disappointment? It won't be necessary to tell them anything except that you are going to try a new treatment."

"But the point is, I am not going to try it." Dane flashed a smile at his friend's startled face.

"Why not?" Archer asked sharply. Goff's warning of yesterday rose up in his mind.

"My reason is so strictly my own affair that I don't want to have to explain it to Alice or my mother. That's all."

"You don't have to believe in this, you know. It is no faith cure."

"Oh, but I do believe in it. I want to believe in it. I want to believe that it is a certain cure, and that I am giving it up of my own accord. Because I *am* giving it up." He had taken a small object from an inner pocket, and now he tossed it idly up in the air and caught it. It was something that

glittered in the sun. Archer watched the pretty play for a minute in silence, and then suddenly he saw what the thing was. It was a small gold ring set with blue stones.

For a moment Archer's mind was a whirlpool of dismay. This was a paralyzing confirmation of Goff's diagnosis.

"Do you mean that you intend to commit suicide?" he demanded.

"What nonsense!" said Dane, with suspicious guilelessness. "Do you call it suicide because I decline to try every new nostrum you recommend?"

"Never mind what I call it. What do you call it?"

"I call it—obeying orders."

"Your physician is the one to give you orders."

"I haven't given you a life commission."

Whereupon, abruptly and without announcement, Goff returned. But in some subtle fashion this was a different man from the slightly satirical, slightly superior person, who had left them a few minutes before. There was a look of concentrated thought on his face that made him entirely forgetful of himself.

"Something has just occurred to me," he said bluntly to Archer. "That shot Marie Donné says she heard—did you hear it? On your second return to the room, you understand. *Did* you hear it?"

"Yes," said Archer. Then, in response to that demanding look in Goff's intent eyes, he added: "I made it. I kicked the revolver in the dark. It went off."

"It was on the floor?"

"Yes."

"That's what I wanted to know. Then the bullet must have gone into the wall, near the floor."

"I suppose so."

"No one thought of looking for that. I'll go and search now. But that ball could by no chance have hit Maurice, where he was lying on the bed?"

"I think that would have been quite impossible."

Goff turned sharply to Dane, who had listened to this colloquy in blank astonishment.

"When you shot Maurice, what position were you in?" he demanded. "What position was he in? Just how were you standing?"

Dane's jaw dropped, and he looked paralyzed.

"Tell him!" said Archer authoritatively. He saw that behind Goff's questioning there lay the possibility of a more complete clearance than even Weaver's confession could give.

"I was—in front of him," stammered Dane. A crimson flood rushed to his forehead.

"Give me the whole story." Goff's voice had suddenly dropped into quiet friendliness.

"I was looking for Archer. I rapped on the door and pushed it open at the same time. Maurice was sitting on the edge of the bed and when I burst in he stood up. I saw he was holding a revolver in his right hand. I don't know whether he meant to shoot, but at the time I didn't feel like taking chances. I jumped for him and tried to turn his wrist. We struggled for a minute, and then the revolver went off between us."

"Where was he hit?"

"In the head. He crumpled up on the floor near the bed. I—did not touch him, but I saw—his head, and——" He was shaking so that it was impossible for him to go on.

"There was only the one shot?"

"Yes."

"I see now. That ball entered under his chin and came out through the cheek. It made a ragged wound, but it was not fatal. The shot that killed him went straight to his heart. The Weasel knew how to shoot, and he didn't fumble. Yes, I see now." Goff's tone was quietly triumphant. To have found the correct answer was a triumph, quite without regard to the personal questions involved.

"The—you think that I didn't—kill him?" Dane was trying to keep his voice steady.

"Evidently not, if that was the first shot. You see, a revolver was found in the room, with two chambers discharged. Maurice was shot twice—once through the jaw, once through the heart. The natural assumption has been that both shots were fired by one assailant, and that the revolver belonged to the assailant, not to Maurice. When Miss Donné said she heard a shot after the man she took for Maurice had gone upstairs, I thought she was mistaken, because I knew that man was Doctor Archer, and I was satisfied that he found Maurice dead when he entered the room. But since you yourself explain the discharge of the second chamber, Doctor Archer, it leaves the second shot—the fatal shot—unaccounted for, unless we accept Weaver's dying statement as true."

His abstracted air melted into a reminder of his former attitude of amused understanding, but it was no longer satirical.

"I see no reason to doubt it," said Archer gravely.

"Neither do I—now. I'll tell Stewart so! Good afternoon!"

Archer rose and accompanied him to the gate. Without looking at Dane, he saw that the boy would be better left to himself for a few minutes.

"Dane says he left Maurice on the floor. He was stretched out on the bed when I saw him," he said to Goff.

"Yes, I noticed that. It agrees with the rest. Evidently Maurice got up after Dane left. He may have lost consciousness for a time, but he was probably sitting on the bed when the Weasel burst in on him. Weaver didn't waste any time—he was making for that fire escape in front. He probably shot at sight, and Maurice fell back across the bed. But if you hadn't been able to explain the second discharged chamber in the revolver on the floor, Doctor Archer, a dozen dying declarations from the Weasel would only have convinced me of—your eloquence! In any event, you did the trick, and I congratulate you!" There was no mockery in his smile now.

Then the gate in the wall swung shut behind him.

Archer walked slowly back to where Dane sat under the oleander.

"As we were saying, when he interrupted us," he began casually.

But Dane interrupted him with something like a cry. "That's all very well," he burst out, "but after all it is only an accident that my shot didn't kill him. In that minute while we were struggling, with the revolver between us, I wanted to kill him. All the horror of him that I had been feeling since I recognized him on the train surged over me. I hoped that the revolver would go off, and set Alice free. It seemed almost—providential! If that shot did not kill him, it was just an accident. And I don't mean to shelter behind an accident!"

"You mean——"

"I mean that if Weaver's life was forfeit, then my life is forfeit. I mean I will not take your new remedy."

"Nonsense! Don't be foolish. Whatever you may have meant to do, you didn't kill him. You must deal with facts."

"That is the fact, for me. Mother and Alice will never need to know—that's all that has made me keep the whole thing to myself. I didn't want to crush them with the truth, unless it became absolutely necessary in order to save some one. That's why I hoped Weaver would never be brought to trial. But—all this explanation doesn't make any difference in my own mind!"

He looked both defiant and pitiful, and Archer saw that he had dwelt on the thought of his own act and desire until he was unable to regard either with the cold balance of sanity.

And then there happened an incident which Archer always regarded as his one demonstrable proof of the hand of Providence. While he hunted for the right word to say to the boy, there came from the street the agonized shriek of a dog, followed by a volley of oaths from a man. Archer was startled, but Neal at once sprang to his feet and ran to the gate in the wall. Without thought of the significance of his action, he flung it open and jumped out into the long-unvisited street, where a man and a motor cycle and a dog with a broken leg were tangled in a knot at the center of a growing group of men and boys.

"Served the damn dog right, if I killed him," the man was shouting profanely. "I've jammed my brake and skinned my elbow and might have broken my neck." And he kicked viciously at the dog, who was trying to get away from the world of men, and dragging a useless leg.

This was too much for Dane. He jumped into the midst of things and landed a neat blow on the cyclist's chin. That astonished and indignant citizen responded in kind and for a few seconds the excited small boys of the neighborhood had an object lesson on the theme that men are but children of a larger growth. But Dane was out of condition and he could not long stand the pace. He drew off, breathing hard, while the cyclist recovered his damaged wheel.

"Why don't you keep your dog at home, then?" would be a condensed and expurgated version of the sulphurous shower of remarks under cover of which he departed.

"Whose dog is he?" Dane asked of the crowd.

"Ain't nobody's dog. Just hangs around," was the multivoiced answer.

Dane picked the dog up in his arms and carried him into the court.

He held the dog while Archer put the

broken leg in splints, and the feeling he showed, and his understanding of dog nature, recalled to Archer the incident of the dog fight at the beginning of their acquaintance. "Cruelty to an animal always gets my goat," Neal had said then. And now he was muttering, with vindictive emphasis:

"If I hadn't been as weak as a girl, I'd have knocked his nut off!"

Archer looked up at him meaningly. "Yes, a strong man is of more use in the world than a sick man, and a live man is of more use than a dead one!"

"I get you," said Dane soberly, rubbing his hand over the dog's muzzle.

"And do you agree to put yourself in my hands now without reservation?" Archer asked quickly. This was the moment to clinch things.

If Neal hesitated a moment, it was perhaps to give him a chance to climb down gracefully. "I will, if you will agree in turn to ask me to be best man at your wedding," he said at last, with an equally significant glance.

Archer finished tying the last bandage before he spoke.

"Do you mean that?" he asked huskily.

"I never meant anything more definitely in my life," Dane said.

Archer put out his hand over the puzzled dog, and Dane wrung it with a force that hurt.

CHAPTER XVI.

The weeks that followed were weeks of a new and serene peace behind the gray wall. That barricade no longer seemed grim, for Neal came and went through the door as readily as any one. His immediate interest was centered in nursing back to strength a lucky dog whose leg had been set by a famous surgeon, and by this shifting of attention his own recovery was assured. Archer watched him closely and, though he was aware of a new seriousness in the boy, he felt satisfied that, whatever self-imposed penalty he might feel bound to enforce, it would now take the paths of life, not of death.

Archer dropped in every day, as a matter of course. At first he went through the form of making some explanation—he had been in the neighborhood, or he had discovered something new about the town which Miss Cheney must know. But soon his appearance came to be taken for granted on both sides.

One day when he let himself into the court he saw Neal and Alice sitting together under the blooming oleander. Alice had been reading, but the book had fallen into her lap, and when she saw Archer she laid her finger warningly on her lip. Neal was asleep in his lounge chair. Archer came up quietly, and after a glance at Neal he leaned over Alice and whispered softly.

"Put on your hat and come out for a bit. How would you like to go down the river for an hour? Or out to one of the parks? Or to explore a new street with me? Mrs. Cheney will come out and sit with Neal till he wakes."

Alice stared at him as though his words held no meaning—as though he were a stranger speaking an unknown tongue. Then she started up, caught his wrist in a straining grasp, and hurried him into the house. Once inside, she turned and faced him, though she still unconsciously kept that hold upon him.

"It was you—*you!*" she said in a tense undertone.

Archer was puzzled no less by her words than by her manner.

"*What* was I?"

"The man—at the ball—who whispered!" Her eyes were searching his face as though she saw him now for the first time.

"Oh!" A dull flush swept over Archer's face to the edge of his hair. It was a moment he had anticipated, yet it had come upon him unexpectedly. "Yes, it was I. I meant to tell you some time—when you could listen with less pain."

She released her grasp on his wrist and sank into a chair.

Archer looked at her keenly. It was difficult to read her emotions, she was so habituated to self-control, but the one thing her candid eyes had always demanded of him, and compelled him to give, was the truth. He drew up a chair near her, for unconsciously they both spoke in guarded tones. It was, he hoped, the last time that he would have to rehearse his story of that eventful night, but she had a right to ask, and to bring peace to her mind he must speak.

"My going to the ball that evening was entirely unpremeditated," he said. "As you know, I had engaged a room at the Monteleone, but it was not ready for me, and I took a room at the Condé House on the

chance that I might not get into my own room that night. While I was there, Mr. Maurice and Mr. Stewart entered an adjoining room, and I could not help overhearing the directions Stewart gave as to meeting the float. After he had gone, I entered Maurice's room, and found him in a drunken stupor and unable to move. I suppose the spirit of the carnival had got into me, for I yielded to the impulse to wear his costume and go to the float and to the ball. I had had no plan of telling you what I did, but when I saw you there it seemed intolerable that you should go on without knowing the truth about the man. Yet I did not tell you half the truth as I knew it." His lips were set in a stern line as he faced her.

She had not taken her searching eyes from his face. "What did you do then?" she asked.

"After you left me in the dance? I went back to the Condé House, to return the costume. When I entered Maurice's room the second time, he was still lying across the bed, as before, but this time he was dead. As I could throw no light on events, I felt justified in departing quietly and leaving the field in the hands of the police."

Would she possibly guess that, above all, he had dreaded being examined, under oath, as to what he might have discovered in the room?

She withdrew her gaze at last, and the tension of her attitude relaxed. Her eyes were downcast.

"Already it all seems so long ago," she said thoughtfully.

The unconscious admission made Archer's heart leap. He leaned toward her, and though he did not touch her, his look was in itself an embrace.

"That was not the only thing I told you that night," he said.

She did not stir, but the soft color, mounting to her forehead, betrayed her consciousness of his meaning. He went on quickly, and all his care for her, all his understanding and tenderness, were in his voice.

"I told you that I loved you. That may have been an impertinence at the time, but it was the truth. I knew it for the truth, though only the mask gave me courage to speak it at that time. I think I knew what you were going to mean in my life the moment that you spoke to me on the train—when you first came to me for help. That sort of recognition sometimes comes in real life, believe me, as well as in fiction. It is still the truth—the overwhelming truth—for me. Is it still an impertinence?"

She was still too tremulous to emotion. The tears welled unconsciously into her eyes and fell upon her clasped hands.

"You have been so good and helpful——"

"It is not gratitude for which I ask."

She raised her eyes to his, and the complete and guileless trust they revealed nearly broke down his self-control. There was no atom of coquetry about Alice Cheney.

"I should be happy, if I dared to think it might be——"

"Alice, darling! Don't be afraid to trust happiness. There is going to be a great deal of it in our life!"

FORTUNES IN FLYING

AMERICANS, the people who invented and perfected the flying machine, are far behind Europeans in making money out of navigation of the air. For instance, there are now four aërial passenger lines operating between Calais and Dover; and in the last four months of last year more than 50,000 people paid for pleasure or business trips in aëroplanes in Great Britain.

However, there is ample evidence that commercial flying gathers in the dollars in this country. Last summer one aviator collected $17,000 in thirty days by taking passengers up for pleasure jaunts in the neighborhood of Atlantic City. Another took in $100,000 during the year by charging from $15 to $25 per passenger per trip. Two others, working as partners and beginning with one old-fashioned plane, drew down $140,000 and added to their original "boat" two new machines.

Kiliwakee

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "A Man of Iron," "Magic," Etc.

Here is a strange tale of the South Seas showing how a figure of speech may lead to tragic results—if it is taken too literally

THE longest answer to a short question I ever heard given was delivered by Captain Tom Bowlby, master mariner, in the back parlor of Jack Rounds' saloon, away back in 1903.

Bowlby still lingers as a memory in island bars; a large mahogany-colored man, Bristol born and owned by the Pacific. He had seen sandalwood wane and copra wax, had known "Bully" Hayes and the ruffian Pease and Colonel Steinberger, and, as to the ocean of his fancy, there was scarcely a sounding from the Kermadecs to French Frigate Island he could not have given you. An illiterate man, maybe, as far as book reading goes, but a full man by reason of experience and knowledge of life—which is literature in the raw.

"And so, usin' a figure of speech, she'd stuck the blister on the wrong chap," said the captain, finishing a statement.

"I beg your pardon, cap," came a voice through the blue haze of tobacco smoke, "but what was you meanin' by a figure of speech?"

The cap, reloading his pipe, allowed his eyes to travel from the window and its view of the blue bay and the Chinese shrimp boats to the island headdresses and paddles on the wall and from thence to the speaker.

"What was I meanin' by a figure of speech? Why, where was you born?" He snorted, lit up, and accepted another drink and seemed to pass the question by, but I saw his trouble. He couldn't explain, couldn't give a clear definition, offhand, of the term whose meaning he knew quite well. Can you?

"Well, I was just asking to know," said the voice.

Then, like a strong man armed, his vast experience of men and matters came to the aid of Captain Tom.

"And know you shall," said he, "if it's in my power to put you wise. When you gets traveling about in languige, you bumps across big facts. You wouldn't think words was any use except to talk them, would you? You wouldn't think you could belt a chap over the head with a couple of words strung together same as with a slung shot, would you? Well, you can. You was askin' me what a figure of speech is. Well, it's a thing that can kill a man sure as a shotgun, and Jack Bone, a friend of mine, seen it done.

"Ever heard of Logan? He'd be before your time. But he's well remembered yet, down Rapa way; a tall, soft-spoken chap; never drunk; blue-eyed, gentle as a woman and your own brother, till he'd skinned you and tanned your hide and sold it for sixpence. He had offices in Sydney, to start with, and three or four schooners in the trade—*bêche de mer,* turtle shell, and copra, with side interests in drinkin' bars and such, till all of a sudden he went bust and had to skip, leaving his partner to blow his brains out and a wife he wasn't married to with six children to fend for.

"What bust him? Lord only knows! It wasn't his love of straight dealin', anyhow. Then he came right down on the beach, with his toes through his boots, till he managed to pick a living somehow at Vavao, and chummed in with a trader by name of Cartwright, who'd chucked everything, owing to a woman, and taken to the islands and a native wife—one of them soft-shelled chaps that couldn't stand luck, nohow, unless it's with them. Logan got to be sort of partner with him. But Cartwright died six months after, and they said Logan had poisoned him to scoop the business. Though some said it was the native wife who did the killing, being in love with Logan—who took her on with the good-will and fixtures.

"If she did kill Cartwright, she got her gruel, for Logan sold out to a German after he'd been there less than a year, and skipped

again. I reckon that chap must have been born with a skippin' rope in his fist, by the way he went through life. They say wickedness don't prosper. Well, in my experience it prospers well enough up to a point. Logan, after he left Vavao, didn't do bad, by all accounts. He struck here and there, pearling in the Paumotus and what not, and laying by money all the time; got half shares in a schooner and bought the other chap out, took her blackbirding in the Solomons, did a bit of opium smuggling, salved a derelict, and brought her right into Frisco.

"He turned the coin into real estate at San Lorenz, and sold out for double, six months after; then he went partners with a chap called "Buck" Johnstone in a saloon by the waterside, close on to Rafferty's landin' stage, a regular Shanghai and dope shop with ward politics thrown in and a hand in the wrecking ring, and him going about Frisco with a half-dollar Henry Clay in his face and a diamond as big as a decanter stopper for a scarfpin.

"He didn't drink, as I was saying, and that gave him the bulge on the others. He had a bottle of his own behind the bar with colored water in it, and when asked to have a drink he'd fill up out of it, leaving the others to poison themselves with whisky.

"Then one night James Appleby blew into the bar.

II.

"Appleby was a chap with a fresh red face on him, a Britisher, hailing from Devonshire, and just in from the islands. He'd been supercargo on a schooner trading in the Marshalls, or somewhere, that'd got piled on a reef by a drunken skipper and sea-battered till there wasn't a stick of her standing and every one drowned but Appleby and the kanaka bos'n. He was keen to tell of his troubles and had a thirst on him, and there he stood, lowering the bilge Johnstone passed over to him, and trying to interest strangers in his family history and sea doings.

"Logan was behind the bar with Johnstone, and Logan, listening to the chap clacking with a half-drunk bummer, suddenly pricks his ears. Then he comes round to the front of the bar and listens to his story and takes him by the arm and walks him out of the place onto the wharf and sits him on a bollard, Appleby clacking away all the time, and so full of himself and his story, and so glad to have a chap listening to him, and so mixed up with the whisky that he scarce noticed that he'd left the bar.

"Then when he'd finished he seen where he was and was going back for more drinks, but Logan stopped him.

"'One moment,' says Logan, 'what was that you were saying about pearls to that chap I heard you talking to? Talking about a pearl island, you were, and him sucking it in. Don't you know better than to give shows like that away in bars to promiscuous strangers.'

"'I didn't give him the location,' hiccups the other chap, 'and I don't remember mentioning pearls in particular. But they're there sure enough, and gold-tipped shell. Say, I'm thirsty. Let's get back for more drinks.'

"Now, that chap hadn't said a word about pearls, but he'd let out in his talk to the bummer that down in the southern Pacific they'd struck an island not on the charts, and he had the location in his head and wasn't going to forget it, and more talk like that, till Logan, sober and listening, made sure in his mind that the guy had struck phosphates or pearls, and played his cards according.

"'One moment,' says Logan, 'you've landed fresh with that news in your head, and you're in Frisco lettin' it out in the first bar you drop into—ain't you got more sense?'

"'It's not in my head,' says the other, it's in my pocket.'

"'What are you getting at?' says Logan.

"'It's wrote down,' says Appleby. 'Latitude and longitude on my notebook, and the book's in my pocket. Ain't you got no understanding? Keeping me here talking till I'm dry as an old boot. Come along back to the bar.'

"Back they went, and Logan calls for two high balls, giving Johnstone the wink, and he takes Appleby into the back parlor and Johnstone served them the high balls with a cough drop in Appleby's, and, two minutes after, that guy was blind as Pharaoh, on his back on the old couch—doped.

"There was a stairs leading down from that parlor to a landing stage, and, when they'd stripped the guy of his pocketbook and loose money, they gave him a row off to a whaler that was due out with the morning tide, and got ten dollars for the carcass. Jack Bone was the boatman they always

used, and it was Jack Bone told most of the story I'm telling you now.

"Then they comes back and closes up the bar and sits down to investigate the notebook, and there, sure enough, was the indications; the latitude and longitude, with notes such as 'big bed to west of the break in the reef,' and so on.

"'That does it,' says Johnstone, 'we're made men, sure. This beats ward politics by a mile and a half,' says he. 'It's only a question of a schooner and hands to work her and diving dresses; we don't want no labor; see here what the blighter says: "Native labor sufficient." Lord love me! What a swab, writing all that down. Hadn't he no memory to carry it in?'

"He'd struck the truth. There's some chaps never easy unless they're putting things on paper. I've seen chaps keeping diaries, sort of logs, and putting down every time they'd scratched their heads or sneezed, blame fools—same as Appleby.

"Well, Logan sits thinking things over and says he: 'We're both in this thing, though it's my find. Still I'm not grumbling. What's the shares to be?'

"'Half shares,' says Johnstone prompt. Logan does another think.

"'Right,' says he, 'and we each pays our shot in the fitting out of the expedition.'

"'I'm agreeable,' says the other, with a grin on his face, which maybe wouldn't have been there if he'd known what was going on in Logan's mind.

"Next morning they starts to work to look for a likely schooner, Johnstone keeping the bar and Logan doing the prospecting. It wasn't an easy job, for they had to keep things secret. They knew enough of the law to be afraid of it, and, though this island of Appleby's was uncharted, they weren't going to lay no claims to it with the Britishers popping up, maybe, or the French or the Yanks, with priority claims, and every damn liar from Vancouver to Panama swearing he'd done the discovering of it first.

"No, their plan was to sneak out and grab what they could, working double shifts and skinning the hull lagoon in one big coop that'd take them maybe a year. Then, when they'd got their pearls and stored their shell, they reckoned to bring the pearls back to Frisco, where Johnstone had the McGaffery syndicate behind him, who'd help him to dispose of them. After that, he reckoned, if things went well, to go back and fetch the shell. Pearl shell runs from three hundred to a thousand dollars a ton, depending on quality, and, gold-tipped being second quality, the stuff would be worth carting.

"Well, Logan had luck, and he managed to buy Pat Gimnell's old schooner, the *Heart of Ireland,* for two thousand dollars, Pat having struck it rich in the fruit business and disposing of his sea interests. They paid twelve hundred dollars for diving gear and a thousand for trade goods to pay the workers—stick tobacco and all such. Then they had to provision her, reckoning the island would give them all the fish and island truck they'd want; and, to cap the business, they had to get a crew that wouldn't talk. Kanakas or chinks. They shipped chinks. Logan knew enough navigating to take her there, and Johnstone was used to the sea, so they were their own afterguard.

"Then one day, when all was ready, Johnstone sold out his interest in the saloon, and the next day, or maybe the day after, out they put.

III.

"I'd forgot to say they took Bone with them. They'd used the chap so much in the outfitting that they thought it was better to take him along than leave him behind to talk, maybe. They'd no sooner cleared the Gate and left the Farallones behind than the weather set up its fist against them, and the old *Heart,* with a beam sea, showed them how she could roll. She could beat a barrel any day in the week on that game. It was an old saying, on the front, that she could beat Gimnell when he was drunk. Bone said the rolling took it out of them so that it was a sick and quarreling ship right from the start to the line. All but Logan. He never quarreled with no one, he wasn't that sort; always smooth spoken and give and take, he held that show together, smilin' all the time.

"Then, ten degrees south of the line and somewhere between the Paumotus and Bolivia, they began to keep their eyes skinned for the island, struck the spot given by Appleby, and went right over it.

"There wasn't no island.

"About noon it was, on the day they ought to have hit the place, an' you can picture that flummuxed lot standin' on the deck of the old *Heart;* thousands of dollars gone on schooner and trade and all—and then left.

"The sails were drawing, and they were

still heading south, and Johnstone up and said:

" 'Appleby's done us,' says he, 'and there's no use in crying over spilled milk. There's nothing for it but to go back and sell off at a loss. I'm done worse than you, seein' I've sold the saloon. Tell you what, I'll give you fifteen hundred dollars for your share in the ship and fixin's. Maybe I'll lose, when I come to realize,' says he, 'for there's no knowing what she and the truck will fetch when it comes to auction.'

"He was one of them lightning calculators, and he reckoned to clear a few hundred dollars on the deal. Logan was likewise, and he thinks for a moment and he says, 'Make it sixteen hundred, and I'll sell you my share in the damn show, right out.'

" 'Done,' says Johnstone.

"The words were scarce out of his mouth when the chink, stuck in the cross trees, cries out 'Ki, hi!' The whole bundle of them was in the rigging, next minute, lookin' ahead, and there, right to s'uth'ard, there was a white stain on the sky no bigger than a window. Logan laughs.

" 'That's her,' says he. Then they see the pa'm tops like heads of pins, and they came down.

"If that was the island, then Appleby's position was near fifty miles out. And again, if it was the island, Logan was done, seeing he'd sold his interest in the show to Johnstone. Bone said he didn't turn a hair, just laughed like the good-natured chap he was, whiles they cracked everything on and raised the place, coming into the lagoon near sundown.

"But Bone had begun to have his suspicions of Logan, by the way he took the business, and determined to keep his weather eye lifting.

"It was a big atoll, near a mile broad at its narrowest, and running north and south, with the reef break to north, just as given in Appleby's notebook. They ran her to the west a bit when they got in, and dropped anchor near the beach where there was a Kanaka village with canoe houses and all, and the Kanakas watching them. They didn't bother about no Kanakas. It was out boat as soon as the killick had took the coral, and hunt for oysters. And there they were, sure enough; a bit more up by the western beach as Appleby had noted in his book—square acres of them—virgin oysters and a dead-sure fortune.

"The chaps came back and went down below to have a clack, and Johnstone turns generous—which he couldn't well help, seeing that Logan might turn on him and blow the gaff. Says he: 'You've stood out and sold your share in the venture, but I'm no shyster, and, if you're willing, you shall have quarter share in the takings and half a share in the shell.'

" 'Right,' says Logan.

" 'You helping to work the beds,' said Johnstone.

" 'I'm with you,' says the other.

"Old Jack Bone, who was listening, cocked his ear at this. It seemed to him more than ever that Logan was too much of a Christian angel over the hull of this business. He knew the chap by instinc' to be a damn thief, or maybe worse. But he said nothing, and then a noise brought them up on deck, and they found the island Kanakas had all put off in canoes with fruit and live chickens and was wanting to trade. It was just after sundown, but that didn't matter to them; they lit up torches, and the place was like a regatta round the old *Heart*.

"Two of the chiefs came aboard and brought their goods with them and squatted on their hams, Johnstone doing the bargaining. When the bazaar was over, Johnstone turns to Logan, and says he: 'Lord love me,' says he, 'where did these chaps learn their business instinc's; Chicago, I sh'u'd think! Where in the nation will we be when it comes to paying them for the diving work? They'll clear us out of goods before a month is over, and that knocks the bottom out of the proposition. It's the labor problem over again,' says he, 'and we're up against it.'

" 'We are,' says Logan, 'sure. These chaps aren't Kanakas. They're Rockefellers; virgin ones, maybe, but just as hard shelled. I'll have to do a think.'

"The chinks had all congregated down into the fo'c's'le to smoke their opium pipes. Logan, he lit a cigar and sat down on deck in the light of the moon that had just risen up, and there he stays like an image, smoking and thinking while the others went below.

"It was a tough proposition. The chinks were no use for diving. They'd been questioned on that subject and risen against it to a man. The island Kanakas were the only labor, and, taking the rate of exchange, the pearls would have had to be as big as turnips to make the game pay.

"But this scamp Logan wasn't the chap to be bested by Kanakas. Having done his think, he went below and turned in.

IV.

"Next morning, bright and early, he tells Johnstone to get the diving boat out, and he sends Bone ashore in the dinghy, with word for the natives to come out and see the fun. Bone could talk their lingo. He'd been potting about forty years in these seas, before he'd taken up the Shanghai job in Frisco, and he could talk most all the island patter. Off he goes, and then the chinks get the diving boat out, pump and all, and two sets of dresses, and they rowed her off and anchored her convenient to the bed. They hadn't more'n got the anchor down when the canoes came out and Logan, talking to the Kanakas by means of Bone, told them he was going down to walk about on the lagoon floor, dry.

"Then he gets into a dress and has the head piece screwed on and down he goes, the Kanakas all hanging their heads over the canoe sides and watching him. They see him walking about and picking up oysters and making a grab at a passing fish's tail and cutting all sorts of antics, and there he stuck twenty minutes, they laughing and shouting till the place sounded more like Coney Island than a lonesome lagoon, God knows where, south of the line.

"Then up he comes, having sent up half a dozen bags full of oysters, and steps out of his diving gear, dry. They felt him, to make sure he *was* dry, and then the row began.

"The chief of the crowd, Maurini by name, wanted to go down and play about, but Logan held off. He asked him what he'd give to be let down, and the chap offered half a dozen fowl. Logan closed, and the chap was rigged up and got his instructions from Bone of what he was to do, and how he wasn't to let the air pipe be tangled, and so on, and how he was to pick up oysters and send them up in the bag nets. Down the chap goes and gets the hang of the business in two minutes, after he'd done a trip up or two and nearly strangled himself. Then the whole of the other chaps were wild to have a hand in the business, and Logan let them, asking no payment—only the oysters.

"In a week's time he had all the labor he wanted. Those Kanakas were always ready for the fun, and, when any of them tired off, there was always green hands to take their places. The work was nothing to them; it was something new, and it never lost color, not for six months. Then the pumps began to suck and they'd had enough. Wouldn't go down unless under pay, and didn't do the work half as well.

"Meanwhile Logan and Johnstone had built a house ashore and hived half a hat full of pearls, and about this time the feeling came on Bone, strong, that Logan was going to jump. He didn't know how, but he was sure in his mind that Logan was going to do Johnstone in for his share, seeing the amount of stuff they'd collected.

"He got Johnstone aside and warned him.

"'You look out,' says he. 'Never you be alone with that chap when no one's looking, for it's in my mind he's going to scragg you.'

"Johnstone laughed.

"'There ain't no harm in Logan,' says he. 'There's not the kick of a flea in him. You mind your business,' says he, 'and I'll 'tend to mine. Whach you want putting suspicions in chap's heads for?'

"'Well, I've said what I've said,' says Bone, 'and I'm not going to say no more.'

"Then he goes off.

"Meanwhile those island tricks had got to fitting things together in their minds, and they'd got to connecting pearls with sticks of tobacco and trade goods, and they'd got to recognize Johnstone as boss and owner of the pearls and goods. They'd named Johnstone 'the fat one,' and they'd labeled Logan 'the one with teeth.' The specifications fitted, for Johnstone weighed all two hundred and fifty, and Logan was a dentist's sign when the grin was on his face, which was frequent

"And so things goes on, the Kanakas diving and bringing up shell and the trade goods sinking, till soon there was scarcely none left to pay the divers, and level with that was the fac' that they'd collared enough pearls to satisfy reasonable chaps.

"One day Bone comes back from the diving and there wasn't any Johnstone.

V.

"He wasn't in the house nor anywhere in sight, and Logan was sitting mending a bag net by the door.

"'Where's Johnstone?' says Bone.

"'How the devil do I know!' says Logan. He was a most civil-spoken chap as a rule, and as soon as he'd let that out of his head Bone didn't look round no more for Johnstone.

"He sat down and smoked a pipe and fell to wondering when his turn would come. He had one thing fixed in his head, and that was the fact that, if he let on to be suspicious, old smiler would do him in. He'd be wanted to help work the schooner back to Frisco, and it was quite on the cards, if he pretended to know nothing and suspec' nothing, he might get off with his life. But my hat! That chap was in a stew. Living with a man-eating tiger at his elbow wouldn't be worse. That night, when no Johnstone turned up, he could no more sleep than a runnin' dynamo driven by a ten-thousand-horse-power injin stoked by Satan.

"Logan said a wave must have taken Johnstone off the outer beach of the reef, or he'd tumbled in and a shark had took him, and Bone agreed.

"Next day, however, when Bone was taking a walk away to the north of the house, he saw a lot of big sea gulls among the mammee apple bushes that grew thick just there, and, making his way through the thick stuff and driving off the birds, he found old man Johnstone on his face with his head bashed in, and et ceteras.

"Bone was a man, notwithstandin' the fact that he'd helped to Shanghai poor sailor chaps. When he seen Logan's work, he forgot his fright of Logan, and swore he'd be even with him.

"There wasn't no law on that island, nor any one to help him to hang old toothy. So he fixed it in his mind to do him in, get him by himself, and bash him on the head same as he'd bashed Johnstone.

"But Logan never gave him a chance, and the work went on till all the trade goods were used up and there was no more to pay for the divers.

"'That's the end,' said Logan to Bone. 'But it doesn't matter. We've pretty well skinned the lagoon, and we'll push out day after to-morrow, when we get water and fruit aboard.'

"'Where for?' says Bone.

"'Sydney,' says the other. 'I'm not going back to Frisco. And, seeing Johnstone is drowned, the show is mine; he's got no relatives. We'll make for Sydney, and to make you keep your head shut, I'll give you the old schooner for keeps. She'll fetch you a good price in Sydney, more than you'd make in ten dozen years longshoring in Frisco. I only want the pearls.'

"'All right,' says Bone, 'I'll keep my head shut and help you work her.' He had in his mind to tell the whole story soon as he landed, for he'd given up the notion of killing the other chap, not being able to get him alone. But they never put out for Sydney, and here's the reason why.

"There was a Kanaka on that island by name of Kiliwakee, a chap with a head all frizzled out like a furze bush. He was a loony, though a good-enough workman, and he'd got no end of tobacco and fish-scale jewelry and such rubbish from Johnstone for his work. Now that supplies had dried up, he was pretty much down in the mouth; he'd got to connect pearls and tobacco in his woolly head, and, as the lagoon was skinned and there were no more pearls, he saw there was to be no more tobacco nor jewelry nor canned salmon.

"Well, that night there was a big Kanaka powwow on the beach. The chaps were sitting in a ring and talking and talking, and Bone, catching sight of them, crawled through the bushes to listen. He heard the chief chap talking. He couldn't make out at first what he was jabbering about. But at last he got sense of what he was saying.

"'There'll be no more good things,' says he, 'sticks of tobacco, nor fish in cans, nor knives, nor print calico to make breeches of, nor nothing. For,' says he, using a figure of speech, 'the man with the teeth has killed the fat one and swallowed his pearls.'

"Then the meeting closed and the congressmen took their ways home, all but Kiliwakee, the half-lunatic chap who sits in the moonlight wagging his fuzzy head, which was his way of thinking. At last he fetches a knife out of his loin cloth and looks at it. Then he lays on his back and begins to strop it on his heel, same as a chap strops a razor.

"Bone said he'd never seen anything funnier than that chap lying in the moonlight stropping away at that knife. It give him a shiver, too, somehow.

"Well, Kiliwakee sits up again and does another brood, feeling the sharp edge of the knife. Then, with the knife between his teeth, he makes off on all fours like a land crab, for the house.

"Bone follows.

"Kiliwakee listens at the house door and hears some one snoring inside; Logan, no less. Then he crawls through the door, and Bone guessed that loony was after the pearls. If Bone had run he'd have been in time to save Logan, but he didn't. He just listened. He heard a noise like a yelp. Then, five minutes after, out comes Kiliwakee. He'd done Logan in and cut his stomach open, but he hadn't found no pearls, not knowing the chief chap had been usin' a figure of speech.

"Now, you know what a figure of speech is and don't you forget it, and if you want to know any more about it go and buy a grammar book. Bone? Oh, he never got away with the schooner, nor the boodle, neither. A Chile gunboat looked into that lagoon next week and collared the fishin' rights and produce in the name of Chile, and told Bone to go fight it in the courts, if he wanted to put in a claim. Said the place had been charted and claimed by Chile two years before. Which was a lie.

"But Bone wasn't up for fighting. Too much afraid of questions being asked, and the doing in of Logan put down to him by the Kanakas. So he took a passage in the gunboat to Valdivia. He'd six big pearls stolen from the takings and hid in the lining of his waistcoat, and he sold them for two hundred dollars to a Jew, and that got him back to Frisco.

"Thank you, I don't mind. Whisky, with a dash, if it's all the same to you."

Another Stacpoole story, "The Monster," will appear in an early issue.

MARRIAGE AND EFFICIENCY

IF you want to be a success in life, get yourself happily married," said Litt Mallory, the Virginia philosopher. "I never yet have seen a happily married man who wasn't doing well in the world. The reason's plain. The fellow who is happy at home develops and presents to his wife his best qualities and moods, and influences her so that she does the same thing. And the man who can do that can work any miracle in a business way that you can think of. He can lead others, inspire others, get the best out of them, bind them to himself in loyalty.

"You see, a happy marriage is an alliance. It is neither a conquest nor a going into captivity. It permits a man to be neither a bully nor a 'softy.' The happily married man surrenders none of his high ideals, none of his sound principles, none of his strong qualities. Only the hen-pecked man does that—and the fellow who's hen-pecked at home doesn't fly very high downtown.

"But the happily married man has, with his wife, learned the art of adjustment without friction, of seeing the other side of things, of being broadminded enough to see that everybody doesn't think alike. Also, he has taken a course in being good-natured, in rising superior to the little worries, and in carrying his share of the heat and burden of the day. He knows how to laugh and how to encourage and create laughter in another.

"Most important of all, perhaps, he has graduated from what you might call the post-graduate course in doing the things that please, the considerate things—all the little things that go to make up that magic quality, politeness. The grouch at home is the man who lets his wife pick up all the trash he makes, who goes on the theory that, when he comes home, everybody there must be jumping sideways and lying down and playing dead for his special benefit. The happy man lightens the burdens, opens the door when she has her hands full, and always treats her as he did before the wedding.

"Yes, sir; when you are happily married, you have proved yourself a diplomat, a polite man, a considerate man, an inventive man, one who thinks of the rights of others and who wants others to have what's coming to them. Moreover, you are a fair and truthful man. No happy marriages are built on lying and deceit.

"And that sort of a fellow is bound to make good on his job. He's trained for business in the best school known to civilization."

Thanking You in Advance

By B. M. Bower

Author of "You Ask Anybody," "Godsend to a Lady," Etc.

Though "Casey" Ryan got the goats of the entire Smith family, it didn't bring him much satisfaction at the time. He had to get that later, in his own peculiar way

"AT that," said Bill, grinning a little, "you'll know as much as the average garage man. What ain't reformed livery-stable men are mostly secondhand blacksmiths; and a feller like you, that has drove stage for fifteen year or so——"

"Twenty," Casey Ryan corrected jealously. "Six years at Cripple Creek, and then four in Yellowstone; and I was up in Montana for over five years, driving stage from Dry Lake to Claggett, and from there I come to Nevada——"

"Twenty," Bill conceded without waiting to hear more, "knows as much as a man that has kept livery stable. Then again you've had two Fords——"

"Oh, I ain't saying I can't *run* a garage," Casey interrupted. "I don't back down from runnin' anything. But if you'd grubstake me for a year, instead of settin' up this here garage at Patmos, I'd feel like I had a better chance of makin' us both a piece uh money. There's a lost gold mine I been wantin' bad to get out and look for. I believe I know now about where to start in huntin'. It ain't lost, exactly. There's on old Injun been in the habit of packin' in high grade in a lard bucket, and nobody's been able to trail him and git back to tell about it. He's an old she-bear to do anything with, but I got a scheme, Bill——"

"Ferget it," Bill advised. "Now you listen to me, Casey, and lay off that prospectin' bug for a while. Here's this long strip of desert from Needles to Ludlow, and tourists trailin' through like ants on movin' day. And here's this garage that I can get at Patmos for about half what the buildin's worth. You ain't got any competition, none whatever. You've got a cinch. There'll be cars comin' in from both ways with their tires hangin' in ribbons, outa gas, outa oil, needin' this and needin' that and lookin' on that garage as a godsend——"

"Say, Bill, if I gotta be a godsend I'll go out somewheres and holler myself to death. Casey's off that godsend stuff for life; you hear me, Bill——"

"Glad to hear it, Casey. If you go down there to Patmos to clean up some money for you 'n' me, you wanta cut out this softhearted stuff. Get the money, see? Never mind being kind; you can be kind when you've got a stake to be it with. Charge 'em for everything they git, and see to it that the money's good. Don't you take no checks unless they cash 'em themselves. Don't trust nobody for anything whatever. That's your weakness, Casey, and you know it. You're too dog-gone trusting. You promise me you'll put a bell on your tire tester and a log chain and drag on your pump and jack! Say, you wouldn't believe the number of honest men that go away for a vacation and steal everything, by golly, they can haul off! Pliers, wrenches, oil cans, tire testers —you sure wanta watch 'em when they ask yuh for a tester! You can lose more tire testers in the garage business——"

"Well, now, you watch Casey! When it comes to putting things like that over, they wanta try somebody besides Casey Ryan. You ask anybody if Casey's easy fooled. But I'd ruther go hunt the Injun Jim Mine, Bill."

"Say, Casey, in this one summer you can make us enough money in Patmos to *buy* a gold mine. I've been reading the papers pretty careful. Why, they say tourist travel is the heaviest that ever was known, and this is early May, and it's only beginning. And lemme tell yuh something, Casey. I'd ruther have a garage in Patmos than a hotel in Los Angeles, and, by all they say, that's puttin' it strong. Ever been over the road west uh Needles, Casey?"

Casey never had, and Bill proceeded to describe it so that any tourist who ever blew out a tire there with the sun at a hun-

dred and twenty and running in high, would have admitted the limitations of his own vocabulary.

"And there you are, high and dry, with fifteen miles of the ungodliest, tire chewin'-est road on either side of yuh that America can show. About like this stretch down here between Rhyolite and Vernal. And hills and chucks—say, don't talk to me about any Injun packin' gold in a lard bucket. Why, lemme tell yuh, Casey, if you work it right and don't be so dog-gone kind-hearted, you'll want a five-ton truck to haul off your profits, next fall. I'd go myself and let you run this place here, only I got a lot of dog-gone credit trade and you'd never git a cent outa the bunch. And then you're wantin' to leave Lund for a while, anyway."

"You could git somebody else," Casey suggested half-heartedly. "I kinda hate to be hobbled to a place like a garage, Bill. And if they's anything gits my goat, it's patchin' up old tires. I'll run 'em flat long as they'll stay on, before I'll git out and mend 'em. I'd about as soon go to jail, Bill, as patch tires for tourists."

"You don't have to," said Bill, his grin widening. "You sell 'em new tires, see? Whichever way they're goin', tell 'em the road's a heap worse ahead than what it was behind 'em. They'll buy new tires—you take it from me they will. And at that you won't need to do much lyin', Casey; no more'n what I've heard yuh do—just stringin' folks along and showin' 'em a good time. And," he added virtuously, "you'll do 'em no harm whatever. If you got a car, you need tires; and a new one'll always come in handy some time. You know that yourself, Casey."

"It's darn little I know about any car but a Ford," Casey admitted plaintively. "When yuh come to them complicated ones that you can crawl behind the wheel and set your boot on a button and holler giddap and she'll start off in a lope, I don't know about it. A Ford's like a burro. You take a monkey wrench and work 'em over, and cuss a lot, and that's about all there is to it. But you take them others, and I got to admit I don't know."

"Well," said Bill, and spat reflectively, "you roll up your sleeves and I'll learn yuh. It'll take time for a stock uh tires to be delivered, and you can learn a lot in two or three weeks, Casey, if you fergit that prospectin' idea and put your mind to it."

Casey rolled a cigarette and smoked half of it, his eyes clinging pensively to the barren hills behind Lund. He hunched his shoulders, looked at Bill, and grinned reluctantly.

"She's a go with me, Bill, if you can't think of no other way to spend money. I wisht you took to poker more or minin' or something that's got action. Stakin' Casey Ryan to a garage business looks kinda foolish to me. But if you can stand it, Bill, I can. It's kinda hard on the tourists, don't yuh think?"

Thus are garages born—too many of them, as suffering drivers will testify. Casey Ryan, known wherever men of the open travel and spin their yarns, famous for his recklessly efficient driving of lurching stagecoaches in the old days, and for his soft heart and his happy-go-lucky ways—famous, too, as the man who invented ungodly predicaments from which he could extricate himself and be pleased if he kept his shirt on his back—might justly, as owner of a garage, be considered a joke pushed to the very limit of plausibility. Yet Casey Ryan became just that after two weeks of cramming on mechanics and the compiling of a reference book which would have made a fortune for himself and Bill if they had thought to publish it.

"A quart of oil becomes paraffine base lubricant and is worth from five to fifteen cents more per quart when you put it into a two-thousand-dollar car or over," was one valuable bit of information supplied by Bill. Also: "Never cuss or fight a man getting work done in your place. Shut up and charge him according to the way he acts."

It is safe to assume that Bill would make a fortune in the garage business anywhere, give him traffic enough.

Patmos consists of a water tank beside the railroad, a siding where trains can pass each other, a ten-by-ten depot, telegraph office, and express and freight office, six sweltering families, one sunbaked lodging place with tent bedrooms so hot that even the soap melts, and the Casey Ryan garage. I forgot to mention three trees which stand beside the water tank and try to grow enough at night to make up for the blistering they get during the day. The Highway—coast to coast, and signed at every cross-roads in red letters on white metal boards with blue arrows pointing to the far sky line—shies away from the railroad at Patmos

so that perspiring travelers look wistfully across two hundred yards or so of lava rock and sand and wish that they might lie under those three trees and cool off. They couldn't, you know. It is no cooler under the trees than elsewhere. It merely looks cooler.

Even the water tank is a disappointment to the initiated. You cannot drink the water which the pump draws wheezingly up from some deep reservoir of bad flavors. It is very clear water, and it has a sparkle that lures the unwary, but it is common knowledge that no man ever drank two swallows of it if he could help himself. So the water supply of Patmos actually lies twelve miles away in the edge of the hills, where there is a very good spring. The head of one of the six families of Patmos hauls water in barrels, at fifty cents a barrel. He makes a living at it, too.

One other male resident keeps the lodging place—I avoid the term lodging house, because this place is not a house. It is a shack with a sign straddling out over the hot porch to insult the credulity of the passers-by. The sign says that this is the Oasis—and the nearest trees a long rifle shot away, and the coolest water going warm into parched mouths!

The Oasis stands over by the Highway, alongside Casey's garage, and the proprietor spends nine-tenths of his waking hours sitting on the front porch and following the strip of shade from the west end to the east end, and in watching the trains go by, and counting the cars of tourists and remarking upon each State license plate. "There's an outfit from Ioway, maw," he will call in to his wife. "Wonder where they're headed fer?" His wife will come to the door and look apathetically at the receding dust cloud, and go back somewhere—perhaps to put fresh soap in the tents to melt. Toward evening the cars are very likely to slow down and stop reluctantly, sunburned, goggled women and men looking the place over without enthusiasm. It isn't much of a place, to be sure, but any place is better than none in the desert, unless you have your own bed and frying pan with you, roped in dusty canvas to the back of your car.

Alongside the Oasis stands the garage, and in the garage swelters Casey—during this story. In general, I cannot vouch for Casey's remaining in Patmos or anywhere else, if he sees the slightest chance of leaving for some place that looks better. Just at first Bill came down from Lund and helped him to arrange and mark prices on his stock of tires and "parts" and accessories, and to remember the catalogue names for things so that he would recognize them when a car owner asked for them.

Casey, I must explain, had evolved a system of his own while driving his Ford wickedly here and there to the consternation of his fellow men. Whatever was not a "hootin' annie" was a "dingbat," and treated accordingly. The hootin'-annie appeared to be the thing that went wrong, while the dingbat was the thing the hootin'-annie was attached to. It was perfectly simple, to Casey and his Ford, but Bill thought that it was a trifle limited and was apt to confuse customers. So Bill remained three days mopping his face with his handkerchief and explaining things to Casey. After that Casey hired a dull-eyed young Mexican to pump tires and fill radiators and the like, and settled down to make his fortune.

Cars came and cars went, in heat and dust and tribulation. In a month Casey had seen the color of every State license plate in the Union, and some from Canada and Mexico. From Needles way they came, searching their souls for words to tell Casey what they thought of it as far as they had gone. And Casey would squint up at them from under his greasy old Stetson, and grin his Irish grin.

"Cheer up, the worst is yet to come," he would chant, with never a qualm at the staleness of the slogan. "How yuh fixed for water? Better fill up your canteens—yuh don't wanta git caught out between here and Ludlow with a boilin' radiator and not water enough. Got oil? Juan, you look and see. Can't afford to run low on oil, stranger.

"No, ma'am, there ain't any other road—and if there was another one it'd be worse than what this one is. No, ma'am, you ain't liable to git off'n the road. You can't. You'd git stuck in the sand 'fore you'd went the length of your car." He would walk around them and look at their tires, his hands on his hips, perhaps, and his mouth clamped shut in deep cogitation.

"What kinda shape is your extras in?" he would presently inquire. "She's a tough one, from here on to the next stop. You got a hind tire here that ain't goin' to last yuh five mile up the road." He would kick the tire whose character he was blackening. "Better lay in a supply of blow-out patches,

unless you're a mind to invest in a new casing." Very often he would sell a tire or two, complete with new tubes, before the car moved on.

Casey never did things halfway, and Bill had impressed certain things deep on his mind. He was working with Bill's money and he obeyed Bill's commands. He never took a check nor a promise for his pay, and he never once let his Irish temper get beyond his teeth or his blackened finger tips. Which is doing remarkably well for Casey Ryan, as you would admit if you knew him.

At the last moment, when the driver was settling himself behind the wheel, Casey would square his conscience for whatever strain the demands of business had put upon it. "Wait and take a good drink uh cold water before yuh start out," he would say, and disappear. He knew that the car would wait. The man or woman never lived who refused a drink of cold water on the desert in summer. Casey would return with a pale-green glass water pitcher and a pale-green glass tumbler. He would grin at their exclamations, and pour for them water that was cold from the coolest canvas water bag inside. Those of you who have never traveled across the desert will not really understand the effect this would have. Those who have will know exactly what was said of Casey as that car moved out once more into the glaring sun, the hot wind, and the choking dust.

Casey always kept one cold water bag and one in process of cooling, knowing he could charge as much as he thought they would pay and be called a fine fellow afterward. He had lived in dry, hot places before, and he was conscientiously trying to please the public and also make money for Bill, who had befriended Casey when he went broke in two nights and a day. You are not to jump to the conclusion, however, that Casey systematically robbed the public. He did not. He aided the public, helped the public across a rather bad stretch of country, and saw to it that the public paid for the assistance.

Sometimes cars stopped at his door merely to inquire inanely if they were on the right road to Needles or to Los Angeles as the case might be. Any fool, thought Casey, would know without asking, since there was no other road, and the one road was signed conscientiously every mile or two. But he always grinned good-naturedly and told them what they wanted him to tell them, and if they shifted money into his palm for any reason whatever, he brought out his green-glass pitcher and his green-glass tumbler and gave them a drink all around and wished them luck.

There were strip-down Fords that tried to look like sixes, and there were six-cylinder cars that labored harder than Fords. There were limousines, sedans, sport cars—and they all carried suit cases and canvas rolls and bundles draped over the hoods, on the fenders, and piled high on the running boards. Sometimes he would find it necessary to remove a thousand pounds, more or less, of ill-wrapped bedding from the back of the tonneau before he could get at the gas tank to fill it, but Casey never grumbled. He merely retied the luggage with a packer's hitch that would take the greenhorn through his whole vocabulary before he untied it that night, and he would add two-bits to the price of the gas because his time belonged to Bill, and Bill expected Casey's time to be paid for by the public.

One day when it was so hot that even Casey was limp and pale from the heat, and the proprietor of the Oasis had forsaken the strip of shade on his porch and had chased his dog out of the dirt hollow it had scratched under the house, and had crawled under there himself, a party pulled slowly up to the garage and stopped. Casey was inside, sitting on the ground and letting the most recently filled water bag drip down the back of his neck. He shouted to Juan, but Juan had gone somewhere to find himself a cool spot for his siesta, so Casey got slowly to his feet and went out to meet trouble, sopping his wet hair against the back of his head with the flat of his hand before he put on his hat. He squinted into the sunshine and straightway squared himself for business.

This was a two-ton truck fitted for camping. A tall, lean man whose overalls hung wide from his suspenders and did not seem to touch his person anywhere, climbed out and stood looking listlessly at the bare rims of two wheels, as if he had at that moment discovered them.

"Thinkin' about the price uh tires, stranger?" Casey grinned cheerfully. "It's lucky I got your size, at that. Fabrics and cords—and the difference in price is more'n made up in wear.. Run yer car inside outa the sun, while I change yer grief into joy."

"I been havin' hard luck all along," the

man complained. "Geewhillikens, but it shore does cost to travel!"

Casey should have been warned by that. Bill would have smelled a purse lean as the man himself, and would have shied a little. But Casey could meet trouble every morning after breakfast and yet fail to recognize her until she had him by the collar.

"You ask anybody if it don't!" he agreed sympathetically, mentally going over his rack of tires, not quite sure that he had four in that size, but hoping that he had five and that he could persuade the man to invest. He surely needed "rubber," thought Casey, as he scrutinized the two casings on the car. He stood aside while the man backed, turned a wide half circle, and drove into the grateful shade of the garage. It seemed cool in there after the blistering sunlight, unless one glanced at Casey's thermometer which declared a hundred and nineteen with its inexorable red line.

"Whatcha got there? Goats?" Casey's eyes had left the wheels of the truck and dwelt upon a trailer penned round and filled with uneasy animals.

"Yeah. Twelve, not countin' the little fellers. And m'wife an' six young ones all told. Makes quite a drag on the ole boat. Knocks thunder outa tires, too. You say you got my size? We-ell, I guess I got to have 'em, cost er no cost."

"Sure, you got to have 'em. It's worse ahead than what you been over, an' if I was you I'd shoe 'er all round before I hit that lava stretch up ahead here. You could keep them two fer extras in case of accident. Might git some wear out of them when yuh strike good roads ag'in, but they shore won't go far in these rocks. You ask anybody."

"We-ell—I guess mebby I better. I don't see how I'm goin' to git along any other way, but——"

Casey was gone to find where Juan had cached himself, and to pluck that apathetic youth from slumber and set him to work. Four casings and tubes for a two-ton truck fitted for pneumatic tires, run into money, Casey was telling himself complacently. He had not yet sold any tires for a two-ton truck, and he had just two fabrics and two cords, in trade vernacular. He paid no further attention to his customer, since there would be no bickering. When a man has but two badly chewed tires, and four wheels, argument is superfluous.

So Casey mildly kicked Juan awake and sent him after the garage jack, and himself wheeled out his four great pneumatic tires, and with his jackknife slit the wound paper covering, and wondered what it was that smelled so unpleasant. A goat bleated plaintively to remind him of their presence. Another goat carried on the theme, and the chorus swelled quaveringly and held to certain minor notes. Within the closed truck a small child whimpered and then began to cry definitely at the top of its voice.

Casey looked up from bending over the fourth tire wrapping. "Better let your folks git out and rest a while," he invited hospitably. "It's goin' to take a little time to put these tires on. I got some cold water back there in that water bag next the corner —help yourself."

"Well, I'd kinda like to water them goats," the man observed diffidently. "They ain't had a drop sence early yest'day mornin'. An' they might graze around a mite while we're here. Travelin' like this, I try to kinda give 'em a chanct when we stop along the road. It's been an awful trip. We come clear from Wyoming. How far is it from here to San José, Californy?"

In the first week Casey had learned that it is not wise for a garage man to confess that he does not know distances. People always asked him how far it was to some place of which he had never heard, and he had learned to name miles at random very convincingly. He named now what seemed to him a sufficient number, and the man said "Gosh!" and went back to let down the end gate of the trailer and release the goats. "You said you got water for 'em?" he asked, his tone putting the question in the form of both statement and request.

When you are selling four thirty-six-sixes —two of them cords—to a man, you can't be stingy with a barrel of water, even if it does cost fifty cents. Casey told Juan to go borrow a tub next door and show the man where the water barrel stood. Juan, who was squatted on his heels languidly pumping the jack handle up and down and seeming pleased when the jack slipped and tilted so that he must lower it and begin all over again, got languidly to his bare feet and lounged off obediently. According to Juan's simple philosophy, to obey was better than to dodge hammers, pliers, or monkey wrenches, since Casey's aim was direct and there was usually considerable force of hard, prospector's muscle behind it.

Juan was gone a long while, long enough to walk slowly to the station of Patmos and back again, but he returned with the tub, and the incessant bleating of the goats stilled intermittently while they drank. By that time Casey had forgotten the goats, even with the noise of them filling his ears.

Casey was down on his knees hammering dents out of the rim of a front wheel so that the new tire could go on. Four of the six offspring crowded round him, getting in the way of Casey's hammer and asking questions which no man could answer and remain normal. While he unwrapped the tires, Casey had made a mental reduction in the price. Even Bill would throw off a little, he told himself, on a sale like this. Mentally he had deducted twenty-five dollars from the grand total, but before he had that rim straightened he said to himself that he'd be darned if he discounted more than twenty.

"Humbolt an' Greeley, you git away from there an' git out here an' git these goats a-grazin'," the lean customer called sharply from the rear of the garage. Humbolt and Greeley hastily proceeded to git, which left two unkempt young girls standing there at Casey's elbow so that he could not expectorate where he pleased, nor swear at all. Wherefore Casey was appreciably handicapped in his work, and he wished that he were away out in the hills digging into the side of a gulch somewhere, sun-blistered, broke, more than half starving on short rations, and with rheumatism in his right shoulder and a bunion giving him a limp in the left foot. He could still be happy——"

"*What* yuh doin' that for?" the shrillest voice repeated three times rapidly, with a sniffle now and then by way of punctuation.

"To make little girls ask questions," grunted Casey, glancing around him for the snub-nosed, double-headed, four-pound hammer which he called affectionately by the name of Maud. The biggest girl had Maud. She had turned Maud upright on its handle and was sitting on the head. When Casey reached for it and got it, without apology or warning, the girl sprawled backward and howled.

"Porshea, you git up from there! *Shame* on yuh!" A shrill woman voice, very much like the younger voices except that it was worn rough and querulous with age and many hardships, called down from the truck. Casey looked up, startled, and tried to remember just what he had said to the dented rim before the girls appeared to silence him. The woman was very large both in height and in bulk, and she was heaving herself out of the truck in a way that reminded Casey oddly of a disgruntled hippopotamus he had once watched coming out of its tank at a circus. Casey moved modestly away and did not look, after that first glance. A truck, you will please understand, is not a touring car, and ladies who have passed the two-hundred-pound notch on the scales should remain up there and call for a stepladder.

She descended, and when her full weight came suddenly on the running board the jack slipped and let the car down with a six-inch lurch. Casey is remarkably quick in his motions. He turned, jumped three feet, and caught the lady in his arms as she was falling toward him. Probably she would otherwise have caught him, but then there would have been little left of Casey, and his troubles would have been finished instead of being just begun.

He had just straightened the jack and was beginning to lift the bare wheel off the ground again when the fifth offspring descended. Casey thought again of the hippopotamus in its infancy. The fifth was perhaps fifteen, but she had apparently reached her full growth, which was very nearly that of her mother. She had also reached the age of self-consciousness, and she simpered at Casey when he assisted her to alight. Casey was not bashful, nor was he overfastidious; men who have lived long in the wilderness are not, as a rule. Still, he had his little whims, and he failed to react to the young lady's smile. His blue eyes were keen to observe details, and they had seen that the girl's neck would be the whiter for soap and water. Even Casey did not approve of "high-water marks" on feminine beauty.

Well, that brought the whole family to view save the youngest who had evidently dropped asleep and was left in the truck. Casey went to work on the wheel again, after directing mother and daughter to the desert water bags which swung suspended from ropes in the rear of the garage.

Ten minutes later a dusty limousine stopped for gas and oil, and Casey left his work to wait upon them. There was a very good-looking girl driving, and the man beside her was undoubtedly her father, and Casey was humanly anxious to be remembered pleasantly when they drove on. He

asked them to wait and have a drink of cold water, and was deeply humiliated to find that both water bags were empty—the overgrown girl having used the last to wash her face. Casey did not like her any the better for that, nor for having accentuated the high-water mark, nor for forcing him to apologize to the pretty driver of the limousine.

He refilled the water bags and remarked pointedly that it would take an hour for the water to cool in them, and that they must be left alone in the meantime. He did not look at the girl, but from the tail of his eye he saw her pull a contemptuous grimace at him when she thought his back safely turned.

Wherefore Casey finished the putting on of the fourth tire pretty well up toward the boiling point in temper and in blood. I have not mentioned half the disagreeable trifles that nagged at him during the interval. Also, Juan was a pest and Casey thought malevolently how he would have to kill him when the job was finished. Juan went around like one in a trance, his heavy-lidded, opaque eyes following every movement of the older girl, which kept her younger sisters giggling. But even with interruptions and practically no assistance the truck stood at last with four good tires on its wheels, and Casey wiped a perspiring face and let down the jack, thankful that the job was done; and thinking, too, that ten dollars would be a big reduction on the price. He had to count his time, you see.

"Well, how much does it come to, mister?" the lord of the flock asked dolefully when Casey called him in and told him that he could go any time now.

Casey told him, and made the price only five dollars lower than the full amount, just because he hated to see men walk around loose in their pants, with their front sagged in as though they never were fed a square meal in their lives.

"It's a pile uh money to pay out for rubber that's goin' to be chewed off on these here danged rocks," sighed the man.

Casey grunted and began collecting his tools, rescuing the best hammer he had from one of the girls. "I wisht it was all profit," he said. "Or even a quarter of it. I'm sellin' 'em close as I can an' git paid fer my time puttin' 'em on."

"Oh, I ain't kickin' about the price. I'm satisfied with that." Men usually are, you notice, when they want credit. "Now, I tell yuh. I ain't got that much money with me right now——"

Casey spat and pointed his thumb toward a sign which he had nailed up just the day before, thinking that it would save both himself and his customers some embarrassment. The sign, except that the letters were not even, was like this:

CHECKS HAVE NO VALUE HERE EXCEPT TO THE OWNER. SHOW US YOUR MONEY AND WE WILL DELIVER THE GOODS.

The lean man read and looked at Casey humbly. "Well, I ain't never wrote a check in my life. Now, I tell yuh. I ain't got the money to pay for these tires, but I tell yuh what I'll do. I'm goin' on up to my brother—he's got a prune orchard a little ways out of San José, an' he's well fixed. Now, I'll write out an order on my brother, fer him to send you the money. He's good fer it, an' he'll do it. I'm goin' on up to help him work his place on shares, so I c'n straighten up with him."

Casey had picked up the jack again, and was regretfully but firmly adjusting it under the front axle. "This ain't the first good prospect I ever had pinch out on me," he observed, trying to be cheerful over it.

"Well, now, you can't hardly refuse to trust a man in my fix!"

"Think I can't?" Casey was working the jack handle rapidly and the words came in jerks. "You stand there and watch me." He swung the wheel free and reached for his socket wrench. "I wisht you'd spoke your piece before I set these darn nuts so tight," he added.

The lean man turned and looked inquiringly at his wife. "Ain't I honest, maw, and don't I pay my debts? An' ain't my brother Joe honest, an' don't he pay *his* debts? Would you think the man lived, maw, that would set a man with a fambly afoot out on the desert like this?"

"Nev' mind, now, paw. Give him time to think what it means an' he won't. He's got a heart."

The baby awoke and cried then, and Casey's heart squirmed in his chest. But he thought of Bill and stiffened his business nerve.

"I got a heart, sure I've got a heart. You ask anybody if Casey's got a heart. But I also got a pardner."

"Your pardner's likely gen'l'man enough to trust us, if you ain't," maw said sharply.

"Yes, ma'am, he is. But he's got these tires to pay fer on the first of the month. It ain't a case uh not trustin', it's a case uh git the money or keep the tires. I wisht you had the money—she shore is a good bunch uh rubber I let yuh try on."

They wrangled with him while he removed the tires he had so painstakingly adjusted, but Casey was firm. He had to be. There is no heart in the rubber trust; merely a business office that employs very efficient collectors, who are paid to see that others pay. He removed the new tires—that was his duty to Bill. By then it was five o'clock when all good mechanics throw down their pliers and begin to shed their overalls.

Casey was his own man after five o'clock. He rolled the tattered tires out into the sunlight, let out the air, and yanked them from their rims. "Come on here and help, and I'll patch up your old tires so you c'n go on," he offered good-naturedly, in spite of the things the woman had said to him. "The tire don't live that Casey can't patch if it comes to a show-down."

Before he was through with them he had donated four blow-out patches to the cause, and about five hours of hard labor. The Smith family—yes, they were of the tribe of Smith—were camped outside and quarreling incessantly. The goats, held in spasmodic restraint by Humbolt and Greeley, and a little spotted dog which Casey had overlooked in his first inventory, were blatting inconsequently in the sage behind the garage. Casey cooked a belated supper and hoped that the outfit would get an early start, and that their tires would hold until they reached Ludlow, at least. "Though I ain't got nothin' against Ludlow," he added to himself while he poured his coffee.

"Maw wants to know if you got any coffee you kin lend," the shrill voice of Portia sounded unexpectedly at his elbow. Casey jumped—an indication that his nerves were unstrung.

"Lend? Hunh! Tell 'er I give her a cupful." Then, because Casey had streaks of wisdom, he closed the doors of the garage and locked them from the inside. Cars might come and honk as long as they liked; Casey was going to have his sleep.

Very early he was awakened by the bleating, the barking, the crying, and the wrangling of the Smiths. He pulled his tarp over his ears, hot as it was, to shut out the sound. After a long while he heard the stutter of the truck motor getting warmed up. There was a clamor of voices, a bleating of goats, the barking of the spotted dog, and the truck moved off.

"Thank Gawd!" muttered Casey, and went to sleep again.

At two o'clock they came back again, limping along on three bare rims. Casey's jaw dropped a little when he saw them coming, but nature had made him an optimist. Now, perhaps, that hungry-looking Smith would dig into his pocket and find the price of new tires. It had been Casey's experience that a man who protested the loudest that he was broke would, if held rigidly to the no-credit rule, find the money to pay for what he must have. In his heart he believed that Smith had money dangling somewhere in close proximity to his lank person.

But if Smith had any money he did not betray the fact. He asked quite humbly for the loan of tools, and tube cement, and more blow-out patches, and set awkwardly to work mending his tattered tires. And once more Casey sent Juan to borrow the Oasis tub, and watered the goats and picked his way among the Smith offspring and pretended to be deaf half of the time, and said he didn't know the other half. The green-glass pitcher was practically useless to travelers, and Juan was worse. A billy goat got away from Humbolt and Greeley and went exploring in the corner of the garage where Casey lived, and ate three pounds of bacon. You know what bacon costs. "Maw" Smith became acquainted with Casey and followed him about with a detailed recital of her family history, which she thought would make a real exciting book. What Casey thought I must not tell you.

That night Casey patched tires and tubes. He had to, you see, or go crazy. Next morning he listened to the departure of the Smith family and the Smith goats, and prayed that their tires would hold out even as far as Bagdad—though I don't see why, since there was no garage in Bagdad, nor anything else but a flag station.

That afternoon at three o'clock, they came back yet again. And Casey neglected to send Juan after the tub to water the goats. Wherefore paw sent Humbolt, and watered the goats himself from Casey's barrel and seemed peevish because he must. Maw

Smith came after coffee again, and helped herself with no more formality than a shrill, "I'm borrying some more coffee!"

That night Casey patched tires and tubes; and afterwàrd wrote a letter to Bill which he carried over to the station and mailed on the midnight train. He wanted to know whether he should trust Smith to three hundred and eighty-five dollars' worth of tires and tubes, or whether he should let the whole qualified family camp on him the rest of the summer.

At six o'clock Smith pounded on the back door and called in to Casey that he would have to have some gas before he started. So Casey pulled on his pants and gave Smith some gas, and paid the garage out of his own pocket. He didn't swear, either. He was past that.

That afternoon Casey watched apprehensively the road that led west. It was two-thirty when he saw them coming. Casey set his jaw and went in and hid every blow-out patch he had in stock, and all the cement.

Smith went into camp, sent Greeley after the Oasis tub, and watered the goats from one of Casey's water barrels. Casey went on with his work, waiting upon customers who paid, and tried not to think of the Smiths, although most of them were underfoot or at his elbow.

"Them tires you mended ain't worth a cuss," Smith came around finally to complain. "I didn't git ten mile out with 'em before I had another blow-out. I tell yuh what I'll do. I'll trade yuh goats fer tires. I got two milk goats that's worth a hundred dollars apiece, mebby more, the way goats is sellin' on the coast. I hate to part with 'em, but I gotta do somethin'. Er else you'll have to trust me till I c'n git to my brother an' git the money. It ain't," he added grievedly, "as if I wasn't honest enough to pay my debts."

"Nope," said Casey wearily. "I don't want yer goats. I've had more goats a'ready than I want. And tires has gotta roll outa this shop paid fer. We talked that all over, the first night."

"What am I goin' to do, then?" Smith inquired exasperatedly.

"Hell, I dunno," Casey returned grimly. "I quit guessin' day before yesterday."

Smith went off to confer with maw, and Casey overheard some very harsh statements made concerning himself. Maw Smith was so offended that she refused to borrow coffee from Casey that night, and she called her children out of his garage and told them she would warm their ears for them if they went near him again. Hearing which, Casey's features relaxed a little. He could even meet customers with his old-time grin when Smith in his anger sent the goats over to the water tank next day, refusing to show any friendship for Casey by emptying a water barrel for him. But Casey had to fire Juan for pouring gasoline into the radiator of a big sedan, and later he had to stalk that lovesick youth into the very camp of the Smiths, and lead him back by the collar, and search him for stolen tools. He recovered twice as many as you would believe a Mexican's few garments could conceal. Juan became a passive enemy from that hour.

Casey was harassed for two days by the loud proximity of the Smiths, but not one of them deigned to speak to him or to show any liking for him whatever, beyond helping themselves superciliously to the contents of his water barrel. On the morning of the third day the lean man presented his thin shadow and then himself at the front door of the garage, with a letter in his hand and a hopeful look in his face.

"Well, mebby I c'n talk business to yuh now an' have somethin' to go on," he began abruptly. "I went an' sent off a telegraft to my brother in San José about you, and he's wrote a letter. My brother's a business man. You c'n see that much fer yourself. An' mebby you'll see your way clear t' help me leave this dod-rotten hole. Here's yer letter."

Casey held himself neutral while he read the letter. As it happens that I have a copy, here it is:

VISTA GRANDE RANCHO,
SMITH BROTHERS,
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA.

GARAGE OWNER, Patmos, California.

DEAR SIR: I am informed that my brother Eldreth William Smith, having suffered the mishap to loose his tires at your place or thereabout, and having the misfortune to fall short of immediate funds with which to pay cash for replacment, has been denied credit at your hands.

I regret that because of business requirments in my own business it is impossible for me to place the amount necessary at his immediate disposel. It is therefore my advise that you lend to my brother Eldreth William Smith such money or moneys as will be necessary for him to purchase railroad tickets for himself and family from Patmos to this place, and

Furthermore that you take as security for said loan such motor truck and equipment, et cetera, as he has now stored at your place of business. I am aware of the fact that a motor truck in any running condition would ample secure such loan as would purchase tickets from Patmos to San José, and I hereby inclose note for same, duly made out in blank and signed by me, which signeture will be backed by the signeture of my brother. Upon recieving from you such money as he may require, he will duly deliver note and security duly signed and filled with the amount. I trust this will be perfectly satisfactery to you as amply securing you for the loan of the desired amount.

Thanking you in advance, Yours very truly,
J. PAUL SMITH.

In spite of himself Casey was impressed. The very Spanish name of the prune orchard impressed him, and so did the formal business terms used by J. Paul Smith; and that "thanking you in advance" seemed to place him under a moral obligation too great to shirk. There was the note, too, heavy green paper, with a stag's head printed on it, and looking almost like a check.

"Well, all right, if it don't cost too much and the time don't run too long," surrendered Casey reluctantly. "How much——"

"Fare's a little over twenty-five dollars, an' they'll be four full fares an' four half. I guess mebby I better have a hundred an' seventy-five anyway, so'st we kin eat on the way."

Casey chanced to have that much coming to him out of the business, so that he would not be lending Bill's money. He watched the lean Smith fill in the amount and sign the note, identifying the truck by its engine and license numbers, and he went and borrowed fifteen dollars from the proprietor of the Oasis and made up the amount. There was a train at noon, and from his garage door he watched the Smith family start off across the lava rocks to the depot, each one laden with bundles and disreputable grips, the spotted dog trotting optimistically ahead of the party with his pink tongue draped over the right side of his mouth. Smith turned, the baby in his arms, and called back to Casey:

"Yuh better tie up them two milk goats when yuh milk 'em. They won't stand if yuh don't."

Casey's jaw sagged. He had not thought of the goats. Indeed, the last two days they had not troubled him except by their bleating at dawn. Humbolt and Greeley had grazed them over by the railroad track so that they could watch the trains go by. Casey looked and saw that the goats were still over there where they had been driven early. He took off his hat and rubbed his palm reflectively over the back of his head, set the hat on his head with a pronounced tilt over one eyebrow, and reached for his plug of tobacco.

"Oh, darn the goats. What t'ell do I care about them goats? They'll be all right fer thirty days, an' if I don't wanta milk 'em I won't milk 'em. Me milkin' goats! Well, now, Casey Ryan never milked no goats, an' he ain't *goin'* to milk no goats! You can ask anybody if they think't he will."

Casey was very busy that day, and he had no dull-eyed Juan to do certain menial tasks about the cars that stopped before his garage. Nevertheless, he kept an eye on the station of Patmos until the westbound train had come and had departed, and on the rough road between the railroad and the garage for another half hour, until he was sure that the Smith family were not coming back. Then he went more cheerfully about his work, now and then glancing, perhaps, at the truck which had been driven into the rear of the garage where it was very much in his way, but safe from pilfering fingers. It was not such a bad truck, give it new tires. Casey had already figured the price at which he could probably sell it, on an easy-payment plan, to the man who hauled water for Patmos. It was more than the amount of his loan, naturally. By noon he was rather hoping the Smith Brothers would fail to take up that note.

Casey, you see, was not counting the goats at all. He had a vague idea that, while they were nominally a part of the security, they were actually of no importance whatever. They would run loose until Smith came after them, he guessed. He did not intend to milk any nanny goats, and that settled the goat question in Casey's mind.

Casey simply did not know anything about goats. He ought to have used a little logic and not so much happy-go-lucky *"t'ell* with the goats!" That is all very well, as far as it goes, and we all know that everybody says it and thinks it. But it does not settle the problem. It never occurred to Casey, for instance, that the going of Humbolt and Greeley and the little spotted dog would make any difference. It really did make a great deal, you see. And it never occurred to Casey that goats are domesticated animals after they have been hauled around

the country for weeks and weeks in a trailer to a truck, or that they will come back to the only home they know.

I don't know how long it takes a goat to fill up. I never kept a goat or goats. And I don't know how long they will stand around and blat before they start something. I don't know much more about goats than did Casey; at least, not until he told me. By that time Casey knew a lot more, I suspect, than he could put into words.

Casey says that he heard them blatting around outside, but he was busy trying to straighten a radius rod for a man—though Casey *said* he was taking the kinks outa that hootin'-annie that goes under the front ex and turns the dingbats when you steer. The man was walking back and forth and slapping his hands together nervously and kept asking how long it was going to take, and how far it was to Barstow, and whether the road from there up across the Mohave was in good condition, and whether the Death Valley road out from Ludlow went clear through the valley and was a cutoff north, or whether it just went into the valley and stopped. Casey says that the only time he ever was in Death Valley it was with a couple of burros, and that he like to have stayed there. He got to telling the man about his trip into Death Valley, and how he just did get out by a scratch.

So he didn't pay any attention to the goats until he went back after some cold water for the white little woman in the car, who looked all tuckered out and scared. It was then he found the whole corner chewed off one water bag, and the other water bag on the ground and a lot more than the corner gone. And the billy was up on his hind feet with his horns caught in the fullest barrel, and was snorting and snuffling in a drowning condition and tilting the barrel perilously. The other goats were acting just like plain damn goats, said Casey, and merely looking for trouble without having found any.

Casey says he had to call the Oasis man to help him get billy out of the barrel, and that even then he had to borrow a saw and saw off one horn—either that, or cave in the barrel with Maud—and he needed that barrel worse than the billy goat needed two horns.

At that, the nervous man got away without paying Casey, which I think rankled worse than a spoiled barrel of water.

Casey told me that he aged ten years in the next two weeks, and lost a hundred and fifty-nine dollars and a half in damages and wages, not counting the two water bags he had to replace out of his stock, at nearly four dollars, wholesale price. When he chased the goats out of his back door they went around and came in at the front, determined, he supposed, to bed down near the truck. It was late before that occurred to him, and, when it did, he cranked up and drove the truck a hundred yards down the road that led to the spring.

The goats did not follow as he expected, but stood around the trailer and blatted. Casey went back and hooked on the trailer and drove again down the road. The goats still would not follow, and he went back to find that the billy had managed to push open the back door and had led his flock into Casey's kitchen. There was no kitchen left but the little camp stove, and that was bent so that it stood skew-gee, and developed a habit of toppling over just when his coffee came to a boil.

Casey told me that he had to barricade himself in his garage that night, and he swore that billy stood on his hind feet and stared at him all night through the window in spite of wrenches and pliers hailing out upon him. However that may be, billy couldn't have stood there all night, unless Casey got his dates mixed. For at six o'clock the Oasis man came over, stepping high and swinging his fists, and told Casey that them goats had et all the bedding out of one tent and the soap, towel, and one pillow out of another, and what was Casey going to do about it?

Casey says that after that it was just one thing after another. He told me that he never would have believed twelve goats could uncover so much cussedness in a day. He said he couldn't fill a radiator but some goat would be chewing the baggage tied behind the car, or billy would be rooting suit cases off the running board. One party fell in love with a baby goat and Casey in a moment of desperation told them they could have it. But he was sorry afterward, because the mother stood and blatted at him for four days and nights without stopping.

Casey swears that he picked up and threw two tons of rocks every day, and he has no idea how many tons the six families of Patmos heaved at and after the goats. When they weren't going headfirst into barrels

of water they were chewing something not meant to be chewed. Casey asserts that it is all a bluff about goats eating tin cans. They don't. He says they never touched a can all the while he had them. He says devastated Patmos wished they would, and leave the two-dollar lace curtains alone, and clotheslines and water barrels and baggage. He says many a car drove off with chewed bedding rolls and didn't know it, and that he didn't tell them, either.

You're thinking about Juan, I know. Well, Casey thought of Juan the first day, and took the trouble to hunt him up and hire him to herd the goats. But Juan developed a bad case of sleeping sickness, Casey says, which unfortunately was not contagious to goats. He swears that he never saw one of those goats lying down, though he has seen pictures of goats lying down and had a vague idea that they chewed their cuds. Casey tried to be funny, then. He looked at me and grinned, and observed, "Hunh! Goats don't chew cuds. That's all wrong. They chew duds. You ask anybody in Patmos."

Casey declares that he stood it for two weeks, and that it took all he could make in the garage to pay the six families of Patmos for the damage wrought by his security. He lost fifteen pounds of flesh and every friend he had made in the place except the man who hauled water, and he liked it because he was getting rich. Once Casey had a bright idea, and with much labor and language he loaded the goats into the trailer and had the water hauler take them out to the hills. But that didn't work at all. Part of the flock came back afoot, from sheer homesickness. The rest were hauled back because they were ruining the spring which was Patmos' sole water supply.

Casey would have shot the goats, but he couldn't bring himself to do anything that would offend J. Paul Smith of the Vista Grande Rancho. Whenever he read the letter J. Paul Smith had written him he was ashamed to do anything that would lower him in the estimation of J. Paul Smith, who trusted him and took it for granted that he would do the right thing and do it with enthusiasm.

"If he hadn't wrote so dog-gone polite!" Casey complained to me. "And if he hadn't went an' took it for granted I'd come through! But a man can't turn down a feller that wrote the way he done. A college perfessor couldn't uh throwed together no better letter than that." Casey's education was not sufficient to show him any weakness in the spelling of that letter, you see. "And that there 'Thanking you in advance'—a feller *can't* throw a man down when he writes that way. You ask anybody." Casey's tone was reminiscently injured, as if J. Paul Smith had, indeed, taken a mean advantage of him.

One day Casey reached the limit of his endurance—or, perhaps, of the endurance of Patmos. There were not enough male residents to form a mob strong enough to lynch Casey, but there was one woman who had lost a sofa pillow and two lace curtains. Casey did not say much about her, but I gathered that he would as soon be lynched as remonstrated with again by that woman. "Sufferin' Sunday! I'd shore hate to be her husband. You ask anybody," sighed Casey when he was telling me.

Casey moralized a little. "Folks used to look at the goats that I'd mebby just hazed off into the brush fifty yards or so, with a thousand pounds mebby of rocks, an' some woman in goggles would say, 'Oh, an' you keep goats! How nice!' Like as if it was something peaceful an' homelike to keep goats! Hunh! Lemme tell yuh, never drive past a place that *looks* peaceful, and jump at the idea it is peaceful. They may be a woman behind them vines busy poisonin' 'er husband's father. How could them darn tourists tell what was goin' on in Patmos? They seen the goats pertendin' to graze, an' keepin' an eye peeled till my back was turned, an' they thought it was *nice* to keep goats!"

At last Casey could bear no more. He gathered together enough hardwood, three-inch crate slats, to make twelve crates, and he worked for three nights, making them. After that he worked for three days, with all the men in Patmos to help him, getting the goats into the crates and loaded on the truck. Then he drove over to the station and asked for tags, and addressed the crates to J. Paul Smith, Vista Grande Rancho, San José, California. Then he discovered that he could not send them except by express, and that he could not send them by express unless he prepaid the charges. And the charges on goats sent by express was, as Casey put it, a holy fright.

But he had to do it. Patmos had been led to believe that he would send those

goats off on the train, and Casey did not know what would happen if he failed. There were the heads of the six families, and all the children who were of walking age, grouped around the crates and Casey expectantly. Casey went back to the garage safe and got what money he had, borrowed the balance from the male citizens of Patmos, and prepaid the express. Patmos helped to load them into the first express car going west, and Casey felt as if some one had handed him a million dollars, all in dimes.

He seemed to think that ended the story, but I am like the rest of you. I wanted to know what the Smith family did, and J. Paul Smith, and whether Casey kept the truck and sold it to the man who hauled water.

"Who? Me? Say! D'you ever know Casey Ryan to ever come out anywheres but at the little end uh the horn? Ain't I the bag holder pro tem?" I don't know what he meant by that. I think he was mistaken in the meaning of pro tem.

"You ask anybody. Say, I got a letter sayin' in a gen'ral way that I'm a thief an' a cutthroat an' a profiteer an' so on, an' that I would have to pay fer the goat that was missin'—that there was the one I give away—an' that the damages to the billy goat was worth twenty-five dollars and same would be deducted from the amount of the loan. Darn these fancy-word slingers!" said Casey. "An' the day before the note come due, here comes that shoe string in pants with the money to pay the note, an' with four new tires fer the truck! Yessir, wouldn't buy tires off me, even! Could yuh beat that fer gall? An' he wouldn't hardly speak."

Casey grinned and got his plug of tobacco and inspected the corners absently before he bit into it. "But I got even with 'im," he added. "I laid off till he got his tires on—an' I wouldn't lend him no tools to put 'em on with, neither. An' then I looked up an' down the road an' seen there was no dust comin' an' we wouldn't be interrupted, an' I went up to the ole skunk an' I says, 'I got a bill to colleck off you. Thankin' you in advance!' An' then I shore enough collected. You ask anybody in Patmos. Say, I bet he drove by-guess-an'-by-gosh to the orange belt, anyway, the way his eyes was swellin' up when he left!"

I mentioned his promise to Bill, that he would not fight a customer. Casey spat disgustedly. "Hell! *He* wasn't no customer! Didn't he ship his rubber in by express, ruther'n to buy off me?" He grinned retrospectively and looked at his knuckles, one of which showed a patch of new skin, pink and yet tender.

"Thankin' you in advance. That's just what I told 'em. An' I shore got all I thanked 'im fer! You ask anybody in Patmos. They seen 'im afterward."

"The Devil's Lantern," the next story in this series will appear in the January 20th number.

AMERICA'S DEBT TO A BURGLAR

WHEN John was eighteen years old, he was a student in a normal school in a little town a short distance from his home. He was studying with the object of becoming a lawyer. First, he would teach school; that would give him the money to support him while studying law. One night, when his father was away from home, the house was ransacked by a burglar. John's mother, naturally nervous the next day, sent for John to protect her during the father's absence.

While loafing about the house a few days later, he saw an announcement in a newspaper of an examination to be held at Trenton, forty miles from his home, for admission to West Point Military Academy. That gave John an idea. The next day he hitched up his "team" and drove to Trenton, took the examination, and won the appointment.

Thus, the burglar who robbed that unprotected Pershing home unwittingly gave to this country General "Black Jack" Pershing, the man who led the American forces to victory in France.

Hey, Listen, King!

By Raymond J. Brown

Author of "The Filming of 'Let-er-go-Gallagher,'" "Dummy Dickinson's Home Run," Etc.

"Lonny" Adair does more than win a bicycle race this time. He proves that a "pull" is as valuable in a royal kingdom as in these United States

BEFORE I get so wrapped up in the tale I'm about to unfold that I won't be able to stop, I want to hang up a warning—it's a war story. I'm telling you that, so's those of you who have been fed up on vivid word pictures of episodes of the great conflict can do your disappearing act right now and so spare yourselves the embarrassment of insulting the lecturer by running out on his oration. I might add, though, that it isn't one of those stories. There'll be nothing in it about Flanders Fields, cooties, the little girl back home, "They shall not pass!" or "Lafayette, we are here!" In fact, I've put as much war into it already as belongs there by rights, and I'll give you my oath on a five-foot shelf of Bibles that I won't mention the world struggle again until right at the end, and then with an apology that ought to take all the curse out of it.

I was chaperoning "Lonny" Adair, the American "Biking Viking" on a tour of Europe. Object, money. Lonny had spent a glorious spring and summer living up to his title of Handicap King on the home tracks and had performed his annual feat of putting half of the winners' end of the New York six-day race into his strong box. All of this made his services on the winter tracks highly desirable to the European bike promoters, and we were over there to collect. The Arrow Bicycle Company was paying expenses on the understanding that while Lonny pedaled the Arrow bike for prizes on the tracks, I was to peddle it on commission to the dealers.

We hit Paris just in time to enmesh Lonny in an engagement to ride the six-day dash which was to be staged at the Velodrome d'Hiver. Now, at the six-day game Lonny never required a partner who could do more than keep himself from being lapped while Lonny tore off the necessary few winks of sleep. No matter who he was hooked up with, Lonny always made it a point of pride to do all the heavy work for the team, and the end of the grind invariably found him grinning and happy, ten pounds heavier than he was when the starting gun was fired and richer by whatever happened to be his split of first money. But I'll say those French promoters acted in a sporting, not to say generous way, when they handed Lonny Pierre la Roche for his little playmate in the Velodrome d'Hiver engagement.

Peary, as Lonny called him, was the nearest thing to what Lonny's twin brother ought to be, if he had one, that I ever saw pushing a racing bike or doing anything else. They were both six-footers, and both two-hundred-pound performers on the Fairbanks. Both had the same kind of taffy-colored hair and laughing blue eyes. Both were big, happy, overgrown kids, taking life about as seriously as a pair of King Charles spaniels, worrying not at all about to-morrow, but battlers to the finish when they heard the fighting word.

And both of them could do everything to a bike that a twelve-cylinder motor could do to an automobile chassis. As far as the long end of the purse was concerned the race was over the minute the management coupled Lonny and Pierre. Their victory was further guaranteed by the fact that Lombardi and Talamo, the Italian team which had copped the race the year before, was held up in Sunny It' for some reason or other and wasn't riding.

Of course, my pair of blond boys had enough gratitude for the favor the promoters had done them, by sticking them into the race together, not to queer the grind from a spectacular standpoint by making a runaway of it. They could have lapped the field at any time after the second day, but they held back even to the extent of letting the

best French team, Dupuis and Bergere, lead them in the point scoring until the last four or five sprints of the final hour, when they cut loose and cantered off with the gravy.

It was soft pickings for all of us, for I wasn't idle while Lonny and Pierre were performing, but had succeeded in wagering a nice pile of franc pieces with some sporty Frenchmen who rather fancied Dupuis and Bergere to nab the blue ribbon. But the best part of all, to my way of thinking, was the outlook in the way of future profits. With Lonny and Pierre to do the riding and me to bicker and bargain with the promoters, it looked as though about three months' time would be sufficient to put us in possession of all the coin that Europe could devote to the bike game. As a starter, I had in my pocket what might be described as an attractive offer for Lonny to ride in the six-day race which was to be held in Brussels in two weeks.

Two days after the Paris race, Lonny and Pierre having made up the sleep they needed, I assembled the two boys in my hotel room and delivered myself of the following:

"Boys," I said, "a rare break in luck has hurled us three together. Separated, we'd be about as useful as a mushroom anchor to a drowning man. Together, though, we form a wonderful syndicate. If we work things clever, we ought to have aching wrists and calloused finger tips from counting the dough we'll grab. The team of Adair and La Roche has already demonstrated its capabilities as a six-day combination, and I'm aiming to shoot you two cycling cyclones through the remaining contests of the European season with a perfect score of bull's-eyes. I've already got Lonny dated up for the next one, and, if you're agreeable, Pierre, which I assume you are, I'll see to it that the management hitches you and Lonny together so that you——"

"The next race?" broke in Pierre, who jabbered English like a native of Boston, although with a slightly Parisian accent. "The next race is to be contested where?"

"Brussels," I told him, "in two weeks—just enough time to let you lads rest up and——"

"Oh, no, no, no, no, *no!*" he cried, leaping up from my bed with a suddenness that nearly stopped my breath, waving his arms and staring at me pop-eyed. "It cannot be! No, no, no, *no!*"

You'd have thought, instead of pointing out to him where there was a nice bundle of jack waiting for him to back in his van and grab it, that I'd suggested that he try his luck at a high dive from the Eiffel Tower. Lonny looked at me, I looked at Lonny, and we grinned. Those foreign boys have a queer way of going up in the air without any cause.

"The 'noes' seem to have it," chuckled Lonny. "But why all the excitement, Peary? No sense in bitin' Windy's head off just because he——"

"No, no, *no!*" repeated Pierre, almost in a screech. "Not Brussels! You do not understand, but Brussels is——"

"From everything I hear of it," I told him, "it's a darned swell place. People say that for all around sportiness gay Paree itself has not a thing on——"

"Yes, yes; I know." Pierre interrupted. "But you do not understand, Windy. I ride in Paris, yes. I ride in Berlin, yes. I go to your America, yes. But Brussels—no! It is quite impossible."

"I don't make you," I said. "It sounds funny to me. Why, I thought the Belgeeks and you Frenchies were the best of friends."

"Frenchies!" exclaimed Pierre. "I am not French."

"You ain't!" Lonny and I yelped together.

"I am Belgian," said Pierre.

"Gee," I told him, "that just makes the plot thicker to me. What's the big idea? Seems to me a young feller like you would be tickled to death to go to Brussels and show the home folks——"

"No, no, *no!*" Pierre interrupted, all excited again. "It cannot be! Do not ask me why. I cannot tell you!" And he shut up like a clam and threw himself into a chair in the corner, gloom and silence settling around him in a thick cloud.

Lonny and I aren't any more inquisitive, I guess, than the average run of folks, but I'll leave you to judge whether Pierre hadn't let himself in for a little gentle third-degree treatment. Anyhow, we sailed into him like a pair of district attorneys, and we hammered at him until we'd extracted the story. It wasn't a very pretty tale from some angles, although it reflected no discredit on Pierre himself. After I'd heard it, I didn't blame the boy entirely for being rather coy about spilling it.

It seemed that some two years before, Pierre had reached the age when it became

necessary for him to start his hitch in the Belgian army, and, like a good patriotic guy, he put up his bike and shouldered his musket. They sent him to a frontier garrison where he did the scrub work they hand to rookies in all armies, and consoled himself with the thought that it would be all over some day and that he could oil up his bike and engage in the pleasant task of riding himself into a bank roll.

One night, only a few months after he'd started soldiering, he was strolling along a road near the post, thinking over his troubles, when he heard a scream. He traced the sound to a clump of trees off the road and rushed in to find a slim little girl of seventeen or so struggling with a man. Pierre handed the guy one on the chin, grabbed the frightened girl by the arm, and steered her to the road. He was asking her where she lived, so that he could see her safely home, when the bird he'd hit came romping out of the woods. Pierre's heart almost stopped beating when the moonlight fell on the guy's face. He was a lieutenant of Pierre's company, the kind of a young rat who's as likely to sneak into the Belgian army as into any other decent organization; a mangy little pup, who was an aristocrat but needed a sign to *tell* anybody he was of noble birth and breeding.

The lieutenant pranced up with blood in his eye. He barked out an order to Pierre to stand at attention and salute, adding a threat about court-martial and a firing squad. His experience on the bike tracks had made Pierre a quick thinker. He knew he was decidedly in wrong for striking his superior officer. In the interests of discipline and the effect on other soldiers, even an honest military court was likely to give him the razzberry, if he tried to excuse himself by saying he had dashed valiantly to the aid of a damsel in distress and hadn't recognized the lieutenant in the darkness. So, as the lieutenant spoke, Pierre hauled off and hit him again, and this time the officer stayed down.

Pierre hustled the girl home, hopped across the border, lost his uniform, and got back into the bike game.

"Which is why," he said, finishing his story, "that I cannot ride in Brussels. Were I to set foot on Belgian soil, I should be instantly arrested. The lieutenant probably has not charged me with striking him, for the reason that to tell his story would be to show himself unworthy of his rank and title. But they would seize me as a deserter, and the penalty is heavy."

"Well, I'll be jiggered!" exclaimed Lonny as Pierre finished. "You mean to say you can't go back to your own country just because you cleaned up that yeller-spined little runt of a lieutenant? Some country! Over where I come from they'd hand you a medal for wallopin' a skunk like that! Yes, and it wouldn't make any difference if he happened to be a—a—an alderman, or somethin' high like that!"

"Perhaps that is so," admitted Pierre, with a sad smile. "The customs of countries differ."

"It ain't right!" declared Lonny, banging on the head of my bed with his fist. "You're gettin' a raw deal. Ain't there somethin' you can do to fix it? Don't you know any politicians or judges or anybody? Isn't there somebody who'll go to the front for you?"

"Oh, you Americans!" laughed Pierre. "Everything, you think, can be accomplished by what you call pull! No, my friend, they do not do things in that manner in Belgium."

"Hell,they don't!" insisted Lonny. "By gum, they'd never job *me* the way they did you! I'd get after my congressman—by jingo, I'd go all the way up to the king!"

Pierre looked shocked.

"You do not know what you say," he smiled at last. "I thank you for your friendly interest, but in my country one does not 'see' the king as you do your legislators."

"Then all I've got to say is it's a hell of a country!" exploded Lonny. And Pierre, who realized that the assertion was more a declaration of friendship, admiration, and sympathy for himself than a slap at his native land, just smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

But, be that as it might, it was impossible for Pierre to ride the Brussels six-day race. The management picked, as a partner for Lonny, Alphonse Dissen—a native son, a thick-chested, muscle-bound shorty with the endurance of a camel but the speed of a road roller. Alphonse was as willing as a business-school graduate on his first day in his first job, but it was Lonny who had to furnish the riding that kept the team up with the leaders.

I guess, in the light of things that have happened in the last few years, I'd be wasting breath by telling you that the Belgian

people are good sports. Anyhow, they tumbled to the fact that the team of Adair and Dissen consisted of one man and a quarter, about, and they passed up the home-bred member of the team to root for Lonny. The Belgians appreciated the gameness and good humor with which Lonny buckled down to his job of doing his own riding as well as what little Dissen left undone, and Lonny thanked them for their hoo-rahs by uncorking for their amusement the brand of spectacular, sensational cycling of which only he is capable.

The last night of the grind found six of the eleven teams, which started, on even terms. At about seven o'clock I hauled Lonny off the track and sent little Dissen out with the understanding that he was to ride himself dead while Lonny slept. The race was to be decided on points—five for first, three for second, and so on—to be scored in a series of sprints every mile in the last hour, and Dissen knew and Lonny knew and I knew that any points scored by the team of Adair and Dissen would be rung up by Lonny. So the little Belgian was ready enough to take an extra long trick on his wheel while Lonny rested up for the finish.

At nine o'clock I was sitting by the trackside, smoking my pipe and congratulating myself on the fact that no attempts at lap-stealing or other unusual occurrences had aroused the spectators to cheers which might wake Lonny up, when all of a sudden there came a roar that shook the building. Every man jack in the arena hopped to his feet and began waving his hat and yelling at the top of his voice, while the band leaped up, too, and started playing a tum-pah tune, featuring drums and cymbals.

I was up with the rest, for that hurricane of noise would have raised the dead. Lonny dove out of his trackside bunk and made a grab for his bike, believing, as I did first, that nothing but a "jam," as we bike folks call a six-day sprint, could have started that riot. Then he saw the riders poking around the track at a pace that a messenger boy would be ashamed of, and a puzzled look came to his face.

"What's the matter, Windy?" he asked me. "Is the place on fire?"

"Search me," I said. Then I noticed that the spectators were all looking and waving in the one direction, and I followed their motions to the cause of the disturbance. There was a line of guys in uniform filing into a box in the center of the lowest gallery, a box that all week had been decorated with the national colors, dropping in festoons from a big shield in the middle of the railing.

"By George, Lonny!" I exclaimed when I noticed a big strapping man—a blond like Lonny and Pierre la Roche—standing at the box railing, bowing and smiling in answer to the cheers, "by George, it's the king! They told me he'd be here for the finish, but I thought it was press-agent talk! Sure; that's just who it is! I've seen his pictures, and I know——"

"Huh!" grunted Lonny sleepily, falling back into his bunk. "If he asks for me, tell him I'm restin' and can't be disturbed!"

Naturally I was interested to see how royalty would behave at a six-day race, so I sat down and moved my chair around to watch the king's box. His majesty looked a little bored at first, which wasn't astonishing seeing as how the bikers were just parading like an old-time wheelman's club on a Sunday morning jaunt. But I'll dare a king or anybody else in the world not to feel thrills and shivers at an exhibition such as the last hour of sprinting turned out to be.

It was, as I expected, Lonny against the field. Little Dissen relieved him four times in the hour, just so's I could massage out of Lonny's legs the knots that had been brought there by his efforts to stand off ten other first-class cyclists who were changing partners for each sprint. But the rest of the time—fifty of the sixty minutes, anyhow—it was Lonny by his lonesome, battling those five other teams as no other man in the world could.

The first sprint he copped breezing, being fresh after his layoff of nearly four hours. The spectators gave him a great hand, even if he did make a show out of Jaspar, a good Belgian cyclist and a prime favorite with the crowd. In the second sprint he beat Lombardi, the Italian, by the width of a tire, and the third sprint saw him come from far back on the last lap and shoot by Jaspar as though the native biker was standing still.

By this time the crowd had tumbled to the fact that Lonny was playing a lone hand. The band tore off "Yankee Doodle" in Belgian rag time and the bunch in the galleries seemed about ready to tear the arms off their seats to express their admiration for Lon-

ny's game efforts. Even the king was interested. I could see him pointing at Lonny, nodding his head, and talking excitedly to a fat man covered with gold braid and medals who sat beside him.

"You're right, king!" I thought. "He *is* some boy! In his own line he's a king—just like yourself!"

Well, Lombardi headed Lonny to the tape by inches in the next sprint. Lonny was tired after his work in the first three dashes. At that, he'd probably have beaten the Italian only he got messed into a pocket on the backstretch and didn't get free to make his bid until it was too late.

I had to laugh at the king as Lonny and Lombardi whirled down the stretch. If I know anything about human nature, his majesty wanted to hop up and root Lonny home. He fidgeted in his chair, rubbed his hands together, smiled and nodded, and his eyes were shining; but, being a king, of course, he couldn't rise up and yell the excitement out of his system. He looked glum, though, when the announcement was made that Lombardi had headed Lonny to the tape.

Now, I won't bore you with a detailed description of the rest of that race. I was keeping score on a little card, and the sixteenth sprint, in which Lonny was unplaced for the fourth time since the point scoring began, showed Lombardi and Talamo to be leading the field with forty-six points, while Lonny and Dissen were in second place with forty-one. Things were beginning to look shaky. There were four sprints left, and Lonny's only chance of capturing first money seemed to be to take them all. Even to me he looked like a hundred-to-one shot, for the constant plug, plug, plug of that hour of sprinting had taken much of his dash and fire from him, and he was now riding mostly on his nerve. I felt helpless and disgusted. There wasn't a single thing I could do to help Lonny. To send little Dissen out to relieve him would be merely to throw away our only chance, for Dissen couldn't have scored points against that field on a motor cycle.

The riders slowed up after crossing the line for the finish of the sixteenth sprint, and the spectators settled back into their seats. Lonny dropped all the way back to the rear of the field. Five teams were changing partners at once, and there was naturally quite a little confusion. The riders who were making the reliefs were just jogging along on the banked track, looking over their shoulders for their partners, while those who were being relieved were coasting along on the flat. I took a sponge from a water bucket, the intention being to liven Lonny up a bit by a little shower on the back of the neck as he passed me. With the sponge in my hand I stepped over to the trackside, craning my neck to pick Lonny out as the riders made the turn into the stretch.

Then I dropped the sponge—splash!—right on the track. Fact is, I nearly fell face forward on the track myself, for, as the field rounded the turn, a crimson streak suddenly shot up the bank, then down; and Lonny, back humped, long legs working like the arms of a bag puncher, grunting and straining from the effort which sent his bike along the track in a series of bounding jerks, dashed by the other riders as an express train would pass a flag station.

It was the most desperate and at the same time the headiest piece of riding he had ever attempted. He had gone out to lap the field, timing his effort to the second, taking advantage of the confusion that naturally attended the swapping of partners by the other teams. It was a long chance, but, if he got away with it, his only sure one of grabbing first place in the remaining four sprints.

Before any other rider on the track woke up to what was happening, Lonny was down the stretch, around the first turn, and a third of a lap in the lead. Trainers who were at the trackside, directing the shifts in riders, were the first to realize what Lonny was up to, and they started yelling out warnings and orders to their bikers in a half dozen languages. The riders were utterly bewildered. Those who had just finished the sprint and were ready to leave the track wound up their gears and started off after Lonny. So did their partners. Everybody got in everybody else's way. In less time that it takes to tell it, Lonny had circled the little ten-lap track, and, when he passed me, he was in front by almost half a circuit.

The spectators, surprised as the riders that anything like an attempt to steal a lap should come at such a late hour in the grind, were again on their feet, yelling like Indians. Their shouts and the wild screeches of the trainers made up the weirdest babel of noise I ever heard. I was shrieking with

the rest, just from excitement, I guess, as Lonny, now going as smoothly and steadily as an eight-day clock, shot by me the second time, picking up the distance that separated him from his dazed rivals inch by inch.

Two laps saw him gain on the rest, a little over a half lap in all; then the other teams straightened themselves out and were after him like a pack of wolves. The third lap, the fourth lap, the fifth lap saw Lonny just about holding his own, for the others were taking turns at setting pace in the chase, which gave them an advantage I needn't explain over a rider who was his own pacemaker. I saw Lonny was wabbling, so I put little Dissen aboard his bike and made motions to Franz, the Swiss boy who was helping out around our camp, to tell him in his own tongue what was expected of him.

Dissen understood without being told, and I'll swear he did his part like a little major. He relieved Lonny and rode his legs dead for six laps, incidentally being credited with winning the next sprint, while Lonny sat on his bike by the trackside, leaning against me, panting and weary, but still full of fight and hope and grinning from ear to ear at the success of his attempt to stir up the monkeys.

The field made up a few yards on Dissen. Then Lonny went out again, greeted by the thunderous cheers of the crowd. And he got what he was after—the lap. The scenes that followed beat anything that I ever saw at any sporting event anywhere. Hats, programs, handkerchiefs—almost everything in the place that was small enough to be hurled in the air—began to drop into the arena like rain. I'm not as young as I was once, but I'll say the kind of acrobatics I displayed at the trackside would have got me a job in any circus.

The grand dukes and other uniformed heavies in the king's box looked ready to let their gold braid and medals follow the hats and score cards of the common people. The king himself was laughing like a man who's really enjoying himself and clapping his hands in a polite, kingly way that didn't come within miles of registering his real enthusiasm.

And the people who'd paid their money to see the finish of that race weren't given any chance to let their fervor die down until the very end. Lombardi and Talamo, the Italians, and Jaspar and Tellier, the Belgians, who were in the running for first money at the time Lonny began his wild sprint, never stopped trying to make up that lost lap until the band sounded the chord that announced the finish of the grind.

There were riders all the way round the track at the end, and it took a wise and observing gent to know who was who and what was what, but there was one thing which every man and woman in that arena did know—that no rider had passed either Lonny or Dissen and that the race was theirs.

As the final score, Adair and Dissen, sixty-one; Lombardi and Talamo, fifty-eight; was hung up on the board, Franz, the young Swiss, and myself were helping the two tiredest but happiest young fellers in the world off their bikes. Little Dissen wasn't satisfied just to grab Lonny's hand and pat his back; he kissed him, and Lonny was so full of joy that he didn't seem to mind it at all.

I threw the red, white, and blue, star-spangled bath robe, which Lonny featured in his European engagements, over my Biking Viking's shoulders, and I was that happy I almost wanted to kiss him myself. Almost. While the gang in the galleries rooted and cheered, we made our way to the stairway that led to the training quarters in the basement. Just as Lonny and I were about to do a twin-brother act in descending the stairs a soldier stopped us, bowed respectfully, and gave me an earful of French. It might just as well have been Turkish. I turned, puzzled, to young Franz and Dissen who were behind us. Their eyes were open a mile and their jaws were on their chests..

"Hey, what's the matter?" I asked Franz. "They ain't going to take the race away from us after——"

"Oh, no, no, no!" he grinned. "But hees majestee—he command——"

"Commands what?" I asked him when he stopped.

"He weesh Lonee and Alphonse dat dey should attend heem by hees box," said Franz.

Well, it was funny to see Lonny waltz in on the king. Another guy might have felt a little bashful going into the royal presence in a bath robe and skull cap, with his face covered with sweat, grime, and a two-day growth of hair. But Lonny? Shucks! What was a king, more or less, in his career? He'd held all four of them once in a session of draw that netted him nine hundred seeds. He'd shaken the hand of every

president from Roosevelt to Wilson; he'd boxed with Jim Corbett, big Jeff, and Mike Gibbons; he was on first name terms with Ty Cobb, John McGraw, "Strangler" Lewis, Jimmy Rowe, Charlie Chaplin, and Al Woods. A mixer; get me? What was there about a king to give him paralysis of the tongue—especially a big, friendly, smiling, blond king; a fine-looking, healthy he-feller like himself?

The local "Tex" Rickard, the promoter of the grind, a burly, pompous lad, handed Lonny and little Dissen over to one of the generals, or counts—whatever they were—who made up the king's box party, taking due advantage of his opportunity to spread himself on a speech. Little Dissen got interfering knees and an attack of bowing and scraping, as the promoter slathered his salve. Lonny, though, probably because he didn't understand a word of what was being said, listened with a bored air that said: "Oh, let's get this over with; you've kept me up late enough as it is!"

The courtier in gold lace, having acquired all the dope the promoter had to give, bowed coldly and disdainfully and lifted his pinkie finger with all the dignity of a head waiter, signaling Lonny and Dissen to come along and be presented to the king. The boys followed him into the box, Dissen's feet getting more chilled by the second, Lonny dolling up for the occasion by removing his skull cap and running his fingers through his hair.

When they were all lined up, the duke in gold lace followed the rules laid down in court etiquette for the presentation of a pair of six-day race winners to a monarch, bowing grandly and speaking at length. The speech, of course, was all Greek to Lonny, all but the last two words—Lawrence Adair. As the master of ceremonies spoke the name he bowed twice—*to* the king and *at* Lonny. Then he ducked.

Well, in Lonny's book of parlor tricks there was only one thing to do when one guy spoke the words that made you acquainted with another guy; and Lonny did it. He shoved out his hand.

"Pleased to meet you, king," he said.

The gold-lace brigade was too well trained to gasp or gulp at the spectacle of a common Yankee bike rider handing the glad mitt to a king, but the gasps and the cries of horror they might have uttered were plainly written on their faces.

The king, though, never batted an eye. I guess every American learned some five years ago that there is at least one king in Europe who is a regular, four-ply, honest-to-Jerry *guy*. Well, yours truly had about two years' start of the rest of you, for I learned it right then. Out went the king's hand, and it closed around Lonny's in a grip that was strong as my Biking Viking's own.

"I am certainly pleased to meet you, too, Mr. Adair," he smiled. And I'll lick the man who says he didn't mean every word of it!

Then he motioned to one of the cloth-of-gold lads, who handed over four little black leather cases. The king opened them and gave two to Lonny and two to Dissen—a gold cigarette case and a pair of gold cuff buttons apiece, engraved with the king's own crest and the date.

"By gum, king," exclaimed Lonny, when he'd examined the presents, "these draw a cheer from me! I'm not much on the coffin nails," he said regretfully, examining the cigarette case, "they hurt my wind; but these here buttons are just what the old doc ordered!"

"A little souvenir," said the king, "in memory of one of the most pleasant and exciting evenings I can recall. Mr. Adair, the energy, courage, and stamina you displayed on the track to-night were a revelation to me. You are a splendid representative of your sport-loving and athletic nation. Certainly, nobody can deny that you are the greatest cyclist in the world."

Now, Lonny may get his "ain'ts" and "dones" a little mixed at times, for the early necessity of going out and hustling for a living rooked him out of the education that would have landed a boy with his natural gifts on the top of any heap he chose for his. But nobody ever accused him of using the stuff that was under his skull for any other purpose than to think with. As the king handed him his proper title—boss of all cyclists—Lonny's four-cycle bean began hitting on all six. He saw a chance. And seeing chances and grabbing them was what had anded him where he was. His eyes sparkled, and he leaned forward eagerly.

"Hell, king!" he exclaimed, with a little grunting laugh. "You're wrong there!"

"Wrong?" echoed the king, lifting his eyebrows.

"About me bein' such a bear of a bike rider, I mean," explained Lonny.

"So?" murmured the king politely. "There is one of of your countrymen, perhaps, who is——"

"One of my countrymen—nothin'!" put in Lonny. "Why, king, the greatest bike rider in the world is one of your own kind—a Belgian!"

"A Belgian!" repeated the king, his eyes widening with interest.

"You're darn well tootin'!" Lonny told him. "And he's a piperino! Why, alongside of him, I'm—I'm a wheelbarrow chasin' a racin' auto! Why, say—this boy is——"

"But how is it," asked the king, interrupting, "how is it that he is not——"

"That he ain't here to beat me to-night?" asked Lonny. "Ain't here to keep the six-day championship of Belgium at home where it belongs? I'll tell you how it is, king—he was jobbed, handed a dirty deal, given the bum's rush out of his own country for actin' like a man! Why, say, king, if you knew Peary la Roche like I do—listen here; I'll tell you about him!"

And he did, adding descriptive matter and character stuff to the little tale Pierre told us in Paris, in a way that would do credit to a newspaper writer dressing up an interview with a congressman from the corn belt. He made a real thriller of the story—gestures, acting, weeps, a catch in his voice; all the trimmings—and he got it across, too; held the king spellbound.

"Why, say, king," he finished, "put yourself in his place! Didn't he do just what you'd have done—what any regular guy would have done? Suppose the little gal he helped was your own sister—just look at it that way! And a good feller? Why, king, this boy's a prince! Every cent he makes on his bike he sends home to his folks!" This was a little detail that Lonny made up on the spur of the moment, but it went big. "And right here—in his own home town—is where he ought to be ridin'!

"You want to see the local boys get theirs, don't you, king? It's only natural. It ain't right for a lot of Yanks like me and wops like the spaghetti brothers—whatever their names are!—to be grabbin' off all the coin and glory that belongs to home talent! You been good to me, king, and I appreciate it. But you can't tell me you wouldn't rather see two Belgian boys landin' these here Willie-pipe boxes and cuff links than only one Belgian boy and a State o' Mainer!"

The king looked thoughtful.

"An interesting story," he admitted. "Where is this La Roche?"

"In Paris," said Lonny.

"You will see him again?"

"Will I!" yelped Lonny. "He's me pal!"

"Might I ask you to visit Colonel So-and-so at Such-and-such barracks to-morrow?" requested the king, naming an officer and a military station whose names I've forgotten. "I have no doubt but that he would be pleased to hear the story you have just told me. Good night, Mr. Adair."

And this time it was the king who shoved out his hand first.

Lonny wore the largest grin I ever saw on any face, when he came down out of the box.

"Quite a confab you had," I observed. "You sure are Kid Phonograph himself! Hardly gave the king a chance to get a word in edgewise!"

"Windy," he said, "there ain't no such thing as workin' political stuff in Belgium!"

"No?" I questioned, having no idea what he was driving at.

"Nope," he laughed, "no more than in Tammany Hall!"

Which was all he'd tell me then. It wasn't until he'd rounded up Pierre in Paris a week later that I got the real story of what he'd handed the king and of the mysterious mission he'd performed the day after the finish of the Brussels race, when he ought to have been making up lost sleep.

"Peary," Lonny said, "you said it couldn't be done, but I've fixed things for you."

"Fixed things?" repeated Pierre, not understanding.

"I pulled a few wires," explained Lonny, "and had that charge against you thrown out of court. I put your case right up to my friend the king. He went to the front for you with one of the boss soldiers—and now you can go back home."

"Oh, Lonny," protested Pierre, "I know you Americans, you like to, as you say, kid. But it is most unkind that you should make joke about my——"

"Make joke, huh?" cut in Lonny, hauling an envelope out of his pocket. "If you think I'm makin' joke, have a good laugh at these!"

And he dropped a pair of healthy-looking documents, covered with fancy printing, gold seals and generals' signatures, into Pierre's hand. One of them was an order transferring Pierre from the garrison he'd hopped to service with the king's guard; the other

awarded him a year's leave of absence "to perform certain confidential duties in his majesty's service."

"And if you're wonderin' what them duties are," said Lonny, "they consist of makin' the name of Belgium famous by the purses you cop and the records you break on your bike. And, when your leave is up, you trot right back and get another year's vacation and start ridin' again. Which proves, Peary, as you insisted, that American pull can't do nothin' in your country!"

They staged another six-day race in Brussels the next month—sort of an Old Home Week Celebration for Pierre. Moreover, Pierre, teamed up with Jaspar, garnered first money. Lonny and Tellier were second, and it was the first and only crooked race that Lonny ever rode. But what could he do? Having told the king what a demon awheel Pierre was, the only course open to him was to back pedal and stall while Pierre won enough sprints at the finish to bring home the bacon.

Which is about all there is to the story—except the war part that I mentioned at the beginning. Somehow after what I've been telling you about, when the gent who used to be called the kaiser got his now famous brain storm and sent his bunch tramping through Belgium, said horde encountered a stout sort of resistance. Wonderful, wasn't it, said the whole world at the time, that the Belgian border forts were right on the job when the Huns came down on them? Sure, it was—especially since telegraph and telephone lines were down and the roads blocked, lest word of the coming invasion sift into Belgium. It happened, though, that a long-legged blond boy on a racing bike—kind of a modern Paul Revere, you might say—got to the forts several hours before the shells began to drop, and it also happened that the first medal awarded to a Belgian soldier for gallantry, bravery, and the rest of it went to a member of the king's guard named Pierre la Roche.

Funny, isn't it, how things work out?

Other stories by Mr. Brown will follow in the near future.

THAT BURDEN OF RESPONSIBILITY

MUCH wishwash is spouted nowadays about the terrific responsibility under which high-salaried men stagger, strive, and struggle through the heat and stress of their work. "If anything goes wrong," says the ten-thousand-a-year magnate, "I'm to blame. The mass of a thousand details rests on my competent shoulders. I have to be a Hercules to get away with it. I'm the boss! The underlings only have to go ahead and do their daily stunts. But I! Me! I've got to see that the dividends come rolling in. No wonder they pay me big money. They know the sense of responsibility that engulfs me is liable to shorten my life by ten years."

But there is another side to the story. In the first place, the "underling" tiptoes along with the knowledge that, if the boss is criticized, the boss is going to make a goat out of somebody under him. Why not? He's human! And every conscientious man, whether he's paid a thousand a month or twenty a week, feels the responsibility of doing well what he has to do. The human mind is capable of only just so much worry—and the boss can't worry any more fatally than the "underling."

Furthermore, the subordinate has a whole set of responsibility senses to which the magnate is, as a rule, a stranger. It is the underling who is attacked by the most harassing responsibility yet devised by man, that of making a slim pay envelope stretch effectively over a large area of expenses. The debt responsibility is enough to break the back of any Hercules who ever heaved a burden. Add to that another variant of the "sense of responsibility;" that is, the worry of many a low-salaried man because he sees no way up for him. There is the most heart-breaking responsibility imaginable. The man who has a family to support and a job from which he expects no substantial increase in pay is deprived of the one antidote for "responsibility," namely, hope.

Making the Populi Vox

By J. Frank Davis

Author of "Statutes Made and Provided," "The Zamboanga Wild Man," Etc.

Even when it may save them money, listening to cold statistics doesn't interest people. So the mayor of Eddsfield employs a publicity expert, with excellent results for all—even Shortridge

WEAVER SHORTRIDGE, president and controlling owner of the Eddsfield Gas and Electric Company, was normally an amiable man, and at the moment had reason to be especially so, having evolved a most excellent scheme for mulcting the good citizenry of Eddsfield to the tune of a hundred and sixty thousand dollars a year, with full legal indorsement and hence no possible comeback.

Being a man who knew when a secret could be kept a secret and when it probably couldn't—and the thing being all fixed, anyway—he dropped into Web Judson's office to tell him about it.

Webster C. Judson, who held no official title other than treasurer of the Republican city committee, was the principal member of a quartet of shrewd gentlemen who managed the inside political affairs of the city of Eddsfield. People who wanted things done by the city council or the Eddsfield representatives in the legislature saw Judson first or afterward wished they had. His enemies invariably referred to him as "the boss," which was not altogether true.

They said other things of him which were not true, either—such as that he stood for graft, and that, so long as the political fortunes of himself and his associates were advanced, he was not concerned with good government. As a matter of fact, the Eddsfield Republican machine—and its members frankly called it a "machine," which is just as good a word as "organization"—gave the city an administration rather better than the average in American municipalities, and would have given it an even better one if a majority of the people had shown they wanted it by taking part in politics.

"Well," Shortridge said, when he had settled himself comfortably in a chair in Judson's inner office and both had lighted the cigars he produced. "The legislature has passed the public-service bill. We are going to get busy under it."

"Naturally," Judson agreed. He was, of course, perfectly familiar with the act to which Shortridge referred. It provided that henceforth it should be the State's policy to recognize that public-service corporations are natural monopolies and protect them as such, in return for which protection the corporations should be limited in returns to eight per cent on their investment. A public-service commission should have supervision of rates to the public, which must be cut whenever the earnings of the corporations exceeded the legal limit.

A good law. But, like many good laws, one with an interesting "joker" in it. Even the corporations which had been paying much more than eight per cent had not objected as seriously to its passage as they might have if they had not appreciated the joker's possibilities. It provided that the valuation on which the allowed eight per cent dividends were to be based should be decided, in each case, by the legislature, through its committee on corporations. The legislature, this year, and especially the committee on corporations, was not unduly radical.

"We are going to be the first company in the State to ask for a determination of valuation," Shortridge went on. He paused, puffed his cigar, inspected it, and then added casually: "Seven millions."

"Why ask for so much more than you can get?" inquired Judson.

"Why not? We need to get six, and if we ask for seven, it gives the corporations committee a chance to cut us down to that and stand all right with the public."

Mr. Judson smiled tolerantly.

"There isn't anybody in hearing, and I hope you aren't trying to kid *me*," he said.

"I *know* about what valuation your outfit is entitled to."

"Six million," repeated Shortridge.

"Not over four," Judson corrected him. "And that is giving you all the benefit of the doubt in several directions. In dollars actually invested, three million would be nearer."

"Franchises, good will, a going concern, and——"

"Which the State insures by guaranteeing you a monopoly. With a four-million valuation you will be getting a fine deal, and every one of your directors and stockholders will be tickled to death—or ought to be."

Mr. Shortridge looked Web Judson squarely in the eye. "We are going to ask for seven—and get six," he said.

"You may ask for seven," Judson replied, just as pleasantly, "but the city can't stand for your getting more than four. Or perhaps four and a quarter."

The corporation president spoke carelessly, but there was significance in his words: "Then we are lucky it is the legislature that decides it." He paid full attention to his cigar while he let this sink in.

"Meaning," Judson asked amiably, "that you might go over our heads?"

"I would hate to."

"But you would unless we are willing to stand for six million or approximately that; is that the idea?"

"We would hate to, but we would have to."

"You have given some consideration to the thought that in such an event we would be up there opposing you."

"Naturally. And as to who would win ——" There was a pause. Then Mr. Shortridge added: "I'm not in the habit of leaping before I look, you know."

"Which is to say that you think you have it fixed already."

Shortridge nodded. "Exactly. You don't like to play losing games any better than the next man."

"I don't, when I can help it," Judson admitted. "But sometimes I can't help it. We've been licked before, at one time and another. Maybe here is where we get licked again. That remains to be seen."

The gas and electric president, while fully prepared for war, much preferred peace. "I wish you wouldn't be too hasty in deciding that," he urged. "Think it over. With us asking for seven million dollars and you fellows appearing before the committee on corporations and demanding that we be limited to six million——"

"Oh, I haven't decided it," interrupted Judson. "It takes more than one man to decide things in this machine; you know that. I shall talk it over with the mayor and some of the others. But I know what they will say, because we have already given the matter some consideration. Four million and a quarter is our limit."

Mr. Shortridge rose to leave. "I don't like to have you not with us," he said. "I don't like it at all. But business is business." He added, at the door, quite as though it were an afterthought: "If you make things harder for us up there at the capital, you naturally won't expect us to do any contributing to the campaign fund next fall—or any falls in the near future."

"Next fall is a long way off," Judson told him. "We might ask you for twice as much as usual."

Shortridge laughed. "I like a good sport, Web," he said. "I am by way of being a good sport myself. You will get twice as much as heretofore—if you beat us and keep that valuation down to four or four and a quarter. Incidentally, that promise may give you a little line on how things lie. I wouldn't make it, if I didn't know what was going to happen. You will save prestige for the little old Republican machine by being a good fellow and playing along." He turned the knob. "You can fight one corporation pretty successfully, or even two. You have, before now, and beat them. But fighting all the public-service corporations in the State at once is quite some job. So long, Web."

"So long. Come in again, any time."

Mr. Judson had not implied, by voice or facial expression, that he was disturbed by his visitor's words, but no sooner had he heard the outer door close than he reached for his telephone. Less than an hour later there were gathered in his office the other three leaders of the party steering committee—Merrill Hart, banker; Lawrence Neal, State senator, who was in town because it was Saturday and the legislature had recessed over the week-end; and young Mayor Orson Kendall. Briefly Judson recounted his interview with Shortridge.

"H'm!" said Neal, when he had finished. "All the corporations united, eh? They are going out to win a big valuation for the

Eddsfield Gas and Electric for the precedent it will make when their companies are reached. Well, if they all pull together, they can do it."

"Not without a scrap," Mayor Kendall remarked quietly. "A four-million valuation would be liberal. Four and a quarter would be giving them decidedly the better of it. If they are allowed six, that means two million dollars extra for the gas and electric consumers of Eddsfield to pay eight per cent on forever. A hundred and sixty thousand dollars a year."

"Maybe we could get Shortridge to shave it to five millions," suggested Hart, whose financial connections made him tolerant of large corporate earnings.

"Thereby reducing what the consumers are skinned from a hundred and sixty to eighty," said the mayor. "No. I'd rather make a fight and get licked."

Senator Neal nodded. "I agree with you, Orson." That his reason for agreeing was not exactly the same as the mayor's was made apparent by his next sentence: "If Shortridge can run a thing like this over us—fix up what he wants with the legislature, without consulting us until after he has done it, every financial interest in town will feel justified in telling us, whenever it feels like it, to go take a running jump at ourselves. No. It won't do to compromise with him at all. We shall take a licking, probably, but we'll let him know he has been where quarreling was going on, and if we put up a good enough fight it will discourage others starting things."

Web Judson, who boasted the baldest cranium in the commonwealth, rubbed it violently, evidence to all who knew him well that he was worried. "It looks like heads Shortridge wins, and tails we lose," he fretted, "but I think you are right. What is the make-up of that committee on corporations, this year?"

"Honest, on the average, but stodgy," replied Neal. "Mostly a lot of fine old fuddy-duddies with all the sympathy in the world for capital with a big C. They will stand for a lot of valuation for franchises, good will, and all that sort of thing, not because anybody fixes them to, but because they would want those things included if they owned the company's stock. And you can bet most of them have banking connections that will put all the necessary pressure on them because the public-service corporations all over the State will have put pressure on the banks."

The others did not need to debate this, which was rudimentary politics.

"There will be a petition, of course," Judson said. "It won't be put in for a week or so, anyway; Shortridge will give us time to get on his band wagon if we want to; that's why he came here to-day. Then there will be public hearings. Our only hope is to make a big fight in the open—and that isn't any hope unless the newspapers happen to play it up big."

"Which, if you ask me, they won't," said Neal. "Not because they are fixed not to—although some few of them might be—but because hearings of that sort are made up of evidence that is mostly figures. Not one man in ten thousand understands or cares for figures. We will get a nice little daily report of fifty lines, if we're lucky, somewhere at the bottom of the financial page."

"I'll get an expert at work on the physical values of Shortridge's plants," the mayor said. "It will cost about fifty dollars a day; I'll have it paid out of the appropriation for special mayor's orders. And I'll turn Desbro loose on working up a case." Desbro was the city solicitor. "Then, when their petition is in, we'll have the city council pass a resolution of protest."

"Can you arrange to go up there and run our side at those hearings yourself?" Judson asked. "Desbro will be all right as far as the legal arguments go, but a dozen things could come up—things calling for quick action by some one in authority—that he wouldn't see if they were right under his nose."

"I think so," the mayor replied. He considered a moment. "I'll make it so," he decided. "A hundred and sixty thousand dollars a year in the pockets of you and me and Tom and Dick and all the other Harrys is worth quite a lot of trouble."

Judson, now that their plan of campaign was as much settled as it could be at the moment, was ready to consider another angle of the situation.

"Shortridge may be back," he said. "I don't think he will, but he may. To save getting together again, what shall I tell him? What is the highest valuation we'll stand for?"

"Four million and a quarter," declared the mayor promptly. "If the figures our expert gives us prove what I think they will, our

claim before the legislative committee will be that it ought to be three million and a half, and perhaps less. Four million is more than fair. But, with a fight in sight—a fight with the odds against us—a compromise at four and a quarter would be reasonable."

His three colleagues expressed their approval.

"Then I'll have that expert here and ready to look over their properties the minute they file their petition," the mayor said. "Desbro's arguments will have to be based on the expert's report, largely, but I'll start him digging into the operation of similar laws in other States, right away."

"Cheer up!" cried Neal cheerfully to Judson. "The worst is yet to come, it is true, but the mayor has got to bear the brunt of it."

Judson allowed himself a frail smile. "I'm not so sure it is going to be the worst thing for the mayor," he remarked. "He is probably due to lose before your bunch of legislators at Hamilton, but if he makes noise enough the people in this town are bound to get some echo of it, and it won't exactly injure his chances for reëlection. Confound Shortridge! I've got nothing against him personally; he's a pretty good fellow and he's playing this game according to the necessities of the case as he sees them; but I'd give most anything I can think of to trim him."

"Every hundred thousand dollars we can shave off his six millions is some trimming," the mayor said.

"Bet you don't get it reduced a cent after all," growled Hart.

"I half believe you're right. Well, I haven't anything personal against him, either, but if he gives us any good opening that isn't going to prevent me going after him without gloves."

Kendall's lack of personal feeling disappeared the morning after the city council passed its resolution of protest against the proposed valuation, when Shortridge, in an interview in all the papers, said he appreciated that politicians had to make a certain amount of demagogic talk for the purpose of getting votes and that while every good business man in the council was perfectly well aware that seven million dollars was a fair valuation for the gas and electric company, it was reasonable enough to expect them and the mayor to oppose it for election day effect. He added, with a great show of tolerance, that Mayor Kendall was "a well-meaning young man," which is a trifle more offensive than most deadly insults.

The mayor overlooked nothing in the preparation of his case. His expert produced about the figures that had been expected, and City Solicitor Desbro did a reasonably competent job in building arguments based upon them. Six weeks later, the hearing before the committee on corporations opened in one of the very smallest committee rooms at the State House. When it had been in progress five forenoons, Kendall began hopelessly to wonder if anybody knew he was making a fight. He was not producing noise enough to warrant an echo in Eddsfield or anywhere else.

Small as it was, the committee room was ample, for there were practically no audiences. Reporters were present on the opening day, but David Leeds, the most eminent corporation attorney in the State, had the floor, and he succeeded in making his presentation of what the Eddsfield Gas and Electric Company wanted so dry, technical, and wholly uninteresting that they wrote very little about it, then or thereafter.

Not even back home, in Eddsfield, were adequate reports of the committee sessions printed. One newspaper there, an extremely conservative one, had taken the editorial stand, at the beginning, that seven million dollars was a not unreasonable valuation. The others thought seven millions too much; one suggested six millions would probably be fair and another shaded this to five. Only one paper—a sensational sheet with socialistic leanings—made any real fuss, and this paper ruined what influence it might otherwise have had by claiming the valuation ought to be not more than two millions, which everybody knew was nonsense.

Kendall's expert testified ably, but there were experts on the other side who also testified ably, and Attorney Leeds was head, shoulders, and body above City Solicitor Desbro. At the end of the fifth day there was every promise that the hearing would drag on for two or three forenoons longer, after which the protest of the city of Eddsfield would be sunk without a trace. Sitting with Senator Neal in the lobby of the Metropolitan Hotel, that evening, Kendall mournfully conceded defeat.

"If we could get the public excited," he said, "we might have a show, but we can't

get anybody excited with the newspapers soft-pedaling the whole thing."

"And you can't expect them to give space to a thing nobody seems to be interested in. If the proposition was a scheme to increase or decrease the price of gas and electricity, with concrete figures as to how much the difference would be, the whole State would be up on its hind legs about it."

"Yet this will reduce the price, a total of a hundred and sixty thousand dollars a year."

"Nobody believes it. They all say that sounds good enough in theory, but that you can trust the corporation to find some way to rig up fake expenses so that the public will get stung in their rates anyway. I can't even get many senators and representatives interested, and they are better posted than the average man on the street. When they pay any attention to the hearings at all, they listen to what Leeds says."

Kendall knew Attorney Leeds personally and liked him as much as he admired his ability. "He is making strong arguments," he conceded, "but ours are sounder. Which is of no value whatever, if the public neither hears them nor pays any attention to as much as it does hear."

A square-set, middle-aged man with a wide, straight mouth, hard, alert eyes, a complexion that indicated he did not get enough out-of-door exercise, and clothing that bespoke the skill of an artist in tailoring and a jewel of a valet passed them on his way across the lobby. Many men bowed to him; many heads were turned to look after he went by.

"Now, if we had *his* ability to get people talking," Neal commented, "we might be singing a different kind of song."

"Who is he?" asked Kendall, with a vague impression that he had seen either the man or his photograph and ought not to have to ask.

"You don't know him? I thought everybody did. That's Brass Band Daley."

Kendall's eyes followed Daley's progress curiously. He needed no further words of identification; whoever in the State read the newspapers was perforce quite familiar with the name. B. B. Daley was a promoter and speculator, more often referred to as "financier." If the making of money at the money game makes a man a financier, he was one, yet he was on no bank directorates. Also, in the use of that word, one usually has in mind something of conservatism, and Daley had been called nearly everything else except conservative. His advertisements, interviews, spectacular campaigns with stocks, and generally sensational methods had won for him a marvelous degree of publicity. Research into the pages of "Who's Who" would have developed the information that he had been christened "Benjamin Bullen," but few knew it. To the public he had been Brass Band Daley ever since a newspaper writer had so dubbed him, years back.

"Well——" The mayor came back to their subject when Daley had disappeared into an elevator. "Have you any suggestion as to anything we can do to-morrow?"

"Absolutely none," the senator regretted. "I can't see that you are overlooking any bets. We are doing our best, and our best means a licking."

"Not overlooking any bets." The thought was comforting to Kendall, as he sat alone in his hotel room, soon afterward, smoking hard and striving to find inspiration in the tobacco for some move that would alter the hopeless situation before the committee on corporations. Some way to get the people aware of what was going on under their careless noses! Some way to make a noise! Such a noise as Brass Band Daley always found a means to make when he needed publicity!

Overlooked bets! Noise! Brass Band Daley! They all jumbled themselves in his thoughts. Had he overlooked a bet that Daley wouldn't have overlooked? Why was it he couldn't get the sensational speculator out of his mind? Was there any connection——"

He had it!

There had been a small clash between Daley and Weaver Shortridge six or seven years ago. The details came back to him now. Shortridge was reputed to have made quite a bit of money by it—fifty thousand dollars or more. Had Daley forgiven him? The answer was easy: Daley seldom wasted time and energy trying to get square for ancient beatings when there was more money to be made by living in the present, but he never forgave anybody.

Mayor Kendall had a good friend in Hamilton who would be quite likely to know Daley well. By telephone he found his friend at home and verified the suspicion that he was sufficiently acquainted with the speculator to arrange an interview between

them. At eleven o'clock the mayor sat in Daley's suite on the top floor of the hotel and stated his case without preface or circumlocution.

"Very interesting, Mr. Mayor," Daley said, when he had finished. "What has it got to do with me?"

"You are a man of great resource," Kendall said. "If we could get the public of this State waked up, we might win. Tell me how to do it."

Daley regarded him in silence, without change of expression, for a moment. Then:

"You have come to me pretty late," he said.

"I never thought of you until an hour or so ago, when I saw you downstairs."

"I've been following this fight you are making before the corporations committee," Daley said abruptly. "Very earnest and honest and ladylike. Ladylike tactics would win before that old crowd of muttonheads once in a million years—on the millionth. Dave Leeds is smoothly chewing your arguments up into spitballs and throwing them into the wastebasket. And you trying to attract the attention of the public with statistics! Statistics! Punk!"

"What can I do?"

"You can't do anything." The speculator was on his feet now, walking nervously back and forth between a window and a mahogany bookcase. "Not a thing! You don't know how. What that committee needs is for somebody to go in there and kick over the tables and chairs and tell them they are a bunch of old crooks who ought to be in the penitentiary, with the chances in favor of their being there unless they either croak soon or mend their ways. Sit up and take notice at that, wouldn't they?"

"Long enough to call the police and have whoever said it thrown out."

"Maybe they wouldn't—not if it was said right, and by the right man." Daley stopped his caged stride and snapped a question:

"If I can fix this up, what kind of a run for my money do I get? Wait a minute! I don't mean I want any pay for it—from you or your town. I wouldn't get into it at all if it wasn't that I thought I could make Shortridge foot the bills. I don't need to tell you that." He smiled grimly. "I would have been into this on my own hook before now, if I had known just where your crowd stood. For all I knew, you could have been making a phony scrap, with the cards all stacked to have a last-minute understanding on some figure that you and Shortridge have already agreed upon. On your word of honor, have you?"

"On my word of honor, we haven't. We told Shortridge we would stand for a valuation of four million and a quarter. We will not compromise that figure. He expects to get six."

"See here!" barked Daley. "Again on your word of honor! If I horn into this thing, I want two promises. First, that you won't make any compromise whatever with him for two days, never mind what happens. Not before the market closes on Thursday. Second, that when you do come to terms with him—if we should have luck—you won't stand for more than four million and a quarter. If you can make it less than that, so much the better."

The mayor answered unhesitatingly: "Yes, to both conditions."

"All right." Daley resumed his walk. "We'll see what can be done. To-morrow morning. What we need is public sentiment. Only you don't know how to get it. There are a good many kinds of cowards, and a politician is the biggest one of them all. Show him where he stands to lose a gob of votes that can be depended upon to hang together—or that can't be, if he thinks maybe they can—and he'll run for cover. 'Vox populi, vox dei.' He keeps his ears so close to the ground listening for it that he wears them off. The trouble is that most of the time the populi doesn't vox. All right. This time that will be my job."

He turned briskly to a telephone, private and not connected with the hotel switchboard, evidently, for when a reply came he said:

"Find Brundage and tell him to come here right away. He's home and in bed, probably. Get him up. And I want Caffery and Johnson, too. At once."

He put up the receiver and faced Kendall again.

"Play along to-morrow exactly as you have been doing," he said. "Don't change your tactics at all. Tell that lawyer of yours to have some of his best arguments ready, with no more figures in them than he just has to have. You might be prepared to get a speech out of your own system, if it comes right, dealing with the wrongs of the people.

I don't think it will come right. There may not be any speeches made to-morrow at all."

"Would you mind telling me——"

"I certainly would. I never tell my plans to anybody. The men who carry them out don't know anything but their own share of the details—and some of them don't know who they are working for. You will have to be satisfied with the knowledge that I am going to make the populi vox."

Kendall saw the first fruits of his interview in all the morning newspapers—on the front pages of such of them as did not have a policy against selling advertising space there. Daley had got busy with a vengeance. He must have been up half the night.

The advertisement filled a quarter page, and its first line slapped every reader in the face in boldest gothic:

THE PEOPLE OF THIS STATE PROPOSE TO BE HEARD.

TO THE HONORABLE WILLIAM H. JERSEY, CHAIRMAN, AND THE HONORABLE MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON CORPORATIONS:

The predatory corporations of this State do not intend to decrease their price for gas, electricity, and street-car fares to a just figure.

They propose, on the contrary, to *increase them!*

That is what is all set up to happen if you grant the petition of the Eddsfield Gas and Electric Company, on which you are now holding hearings. Don't you know it? Don't you know that the Eddsfield Gas and Electric Company is just the stalking horse for the public-service companies of the whole State?

Your hearings have now been in progress five days—very quietly. Why have they been so quiet? Who is pussy-footing? *Why don't you hear the people?*

They have been waiting—the People—for you to summon them to get their views. You haven't summoned them. So they are coming to-day—Wednesday, at ten o'clock, at the State House—without any invitation.

JAMES OGDEN CRAYDON

is going to speak for them. *He is going to tell you what the people demand.* He will not pussy-foot. He will talk plain truths about the corporations that are trying to put this job over. He will tell you plain truths about what it is your duty to do.

A few hundred men and women—representative of the hundreds of thousands of men and women who are interested in this question of what gas and electric rates are to be—in this question of dollars and cents in or out of their pockets—will be there to hear him. *And to observe how you receive what he says in their behalf.*

Remember, gentlemen, whether the big corporations like it or not, that *the people of this State propose to be heard.*

Kendall gasped a trifle; brass-band methods of publicity were somewhat outside his experience. Yet he noted admiringly how directly it went at the heart of the matter, how cleverly it was aimed at the psychology of the crowd. Not a word about valuations upon which dividends should be paid. Nothing about physical properties, good will, franchises—all the things that had been so drearily referred to again and again during the past five days. No figures. Merely the appeal to the pocket nerve: Take heed, or you will have your gas and electric bills and street-car fares jumped.

"A few hundred men and women will be there." A reckless promise, seeing that on no day heretofore had ten men been there, outside those officially interested. He sensed that again this was psychology; one reader would go because he believed a lot of others were going. And because he wanted to hear James Ogden Craydon.

Everybody knew Craydon. He was a great lawyer, especially famous for his defense of criminals, a real orator, brilliant, resourceful, not always utterly scrupulous but never so unscrupulous as to win rebuke from the bar association. Kendall didn't believe Daley had secured him at such short notice for a penny less than a five-thousand-dollar retaining fee and five hundred dollars per diem for the days or fraction of days he worked. Daley did nothing by halves.

What was Craydon going to say? Kendall felt a deep curiosity as to this—a curiosity, he realized, that the public generally would share. He was still rereading the advertisement, half pleased, half disgusted with its demagogic blatancy, when Neal came hurrying to see if he had any idea of what it all meant. The senator was enthusiastic over the explanation. Without being too sanguine, he could see nothing but good to come out of Daley's participation in their crusade, because nothing could make their outlook worse than it had been.

They journeyed together up to the State House at nine-thirty—and stared, almost unbelieving.

Already the corridors of the big building were filled with men and women—mostly men—all of whom seemed to be seeking the place of the corporation committee hearing. "Room 34," the aged veterans who tended the doors and elevators told them, and they were unable to get within a hundred feet of it for the people there ahead of them.

"What's the idea?" a tall, thin man with a loud, indignant voice was shouting, as Kendall and Neal came into the corridor. "Don't they want *any* of us to get in?"

"It's a game to freeze us out," Kendall heard a fussy-looking little man reply. "I've believed it all the time." The mayor would have been willing to wager the little man had never even heard of the Eddsfield Gas and Electric Company hearings until he had read Daley's advertisement. The neighbor to whom he voiced this conviction that they were the victims of a conspiracy promptly agreed. "Gang of grafters!" he opined. "In Denver, or somewhere, one time, the citizens went to the city hall with ropes——"

A messenger came from somewhere to announce loudly that the place of the hearing had been changed to Room 12. There was a surge to find it.

Room 12 was the largest committee room in the State House. It would accommodate a hundred people easily; a hundred and fifty could jam into it. Three minutes after the announcement it was bulging full—and still the crowd swarmed through the corridors and demanded why the committee wouldn't furnish a place large enough to hold it. There were more people coming through the outer doors every minute. From the windows still more could be seen approaching up the hill.

A burst of loud cheering sounded outside the main entrance at ten minutes of ten. James Ogden Craydon had arrived. He bowed gravely right and left in recognition of the applause, and disappeared into a ground-floor office.

The members of the corporations committee, fifteen of them, came through the corridor toward Committee Room 12 a few moments later, preceded by a bustling messenger who called, in an ancient, squeaky voice: "Make way, please, gentlemen! The committee!"

"That's the gang that doesn't want us to be heard!" somebody exclaimed, with no attempt to keep them from hearing him. "Why don't they throw open the house of representatives?"

"That's why!" another man cried. "Because they don't want us in."

The committeemen, trying to look extra dignified, only succeeded in looking nervous.

"Have we got to hold a mass meeting in Lincoln Park?" It was the same man who had suggested opening the house for the hearing who shouted this query. "We can get liberty and free speech there."

"Who is that chap?" Kendall asked a pushing individual at his elbow. "Do you know?"

"His name is Brundage, I think," the man said. "He is a real-estate man, or insurance, or something."

The committee itself could not get to the door of Room 12. "Make way there!" shrilled the old veteran at their head. "Make way for the committee, gentlemen!"

"Steady, granpa," somebody called, good-naturedly. "You can't buck that mob. Why should they get in, if we can't?"

Senator William H. Jersey, chairman of the committee, was an up-State lawyer with a conservative mind and clipped, white chop whiskers. He had never felt so insulted in his life. "Go telephone for the police," he told the Civil War veteran. The little old man, glad to get out of the jam, obeyed with alacrity.

The committee, finding the crowd had closed in behind it, perforce stood waiting. A few of the hundreds jeered them. Most of the others eyed them with hostility.

Not twenty in all that company, probably, had any clear idea of what the Eddsfield Gas and Electric hearing was all about, but it was becoming perfectly obvious to them that their rights as free American citizens were being trampled upon. They had come, to be sure, from mere curiosity, but this they had completely forgotten. They thought, by now, that they had come to protest. They were the People, proposing to be heard.

A dozen policemen came suddenly into sight.

"Clear this corridor!" Senator Jersey commanded the sergeant in charge.

A murmur that threatened to swell into a roar went up. "They've called the cops to put us out!" a man yelled. "They're putting the people out of the people's State House!" cried another. Kendall happened to see his face; he was the tall, thin person who at an earlier moment, up on the other floor near Room 34, had declared the committee wanted nobody to get into the hearing. "Well, we'll have something to say about that on election day."

"You're damn right we will, Caffery!" a voice replied.

Brundage and Caffery accounted for, Kendall wondered which shouter was Johnson.

Not that it mattered, now. Leaders were no longer necessary.

The policemen, as good-naturedly as possible, were slowly moving the crowd. There was a cry from its rim of "Craydon!" Other cries: "Let him through!" "Do they dare keep Craydon out?" "Tell 'em where they get off, Mr. Craydon!" "Make them hold it where we can be present!" "If they can't use the house of representatives, they can hire a hall!"

They gave way for the great lawyer, and hushed to hear him address Chairman Jersey.

"Are you going to force us to be heard only in this limited committee room, which is already too full to get into?" he asked clearly.

"It's the largest room in the building, Mr. Craydon," Jersey replied.

"And we cannot use the hall of the house?"

"That is all prepared for the session this afternoon. It couldn't be arranged at this late hour."

A chorus of mocking cries arose. Chairman Jersey conferred hurriedly with his committee associates. He turned, then, and spoke to Craydon, but loudly, for the benefit of all:

"We shall go on with the hearing in the house of representatives at ten o'clock to-morrow morning," he said. "There will be room there for everybody. For to-day, the hearing is adjourned."

"On the run!" whispered Neal delightedly, in Kendall's ear.

The crowd opened to let Lawyer Craydon retrace his steps toward the entrance. "Very satisfactory," he was repeating to those who hailed him. "We'll all be here to-morrow."

A swarm of reporters seized him. He asked them if it wouldn't be more convenient for them to meet him in fifteen minutes at his office. They said they would go right along with him.

The most conservative headline in that afternoon's Hamilton newspapers was:

MOB STORMS STATE HOUSE.

Demands Public Be Heard Before Action is Taken that it is Claimed Will Raise Light Rates.

Not one paper gave less than a column to the forenoon's exciting events on Capitol Hill, and a column to a column and a half was their average on the Craydon interview. Most clever and ingenious was that interview. It had just as many figures and statistics as were necessary to explain what the Eddsfield bill meant, and no more. Principally it dealt with what would happen after the petition had been granted—high-priced gas and electricity to the people from one end of the State to the other.

The Eddsfield bill had become the most important news of the day, and was treated accordingly.

Long dispatches went out over the telegraph wires. Editorials appeared. The public, everywhere, talked of its rights. The State awoke. Incidentally, Eddsfield Gas and Electric stock, which had been inactive for months at one hundred and twelve, sold down to one hundred and seven.

There were police reserves on duty at the State House, the next forenoon, and the crowds were orderly, but grim. Five minutes after its doors had been opened, the house of representatives, floor and galleries, was filled. More than two thousand people, unable to get within sound of the great hall, held a mass meeting in the State House grounds. Among those who addressed them, informally and quite impromptu, was a grave, well-dressed man named Brundage and a tall, thin person, something of a politician in a reform way, named Caffery.

In the House, when the committee had filed in, looking individually and collectively worried, Mr. James Ogden Craydon rose to speak.

"Whom do you represent, Mr. Craydon?" inquired the chairman.

"The people of this State," declared the lawyer in his deep, vibrant voice, and there was an instant riot of applause.

"Can't you be a little more concrete than that?" Senator Jersey asked, smiling. He and the others of the committee had been unable to ascertain who was paying for that advertising; even the newspapers only knew that it came to them through an agency. "You are retained by some association, perhaps."

"I represent James O. Craydon, of 534 Summit Avenue, this city," the attorney replied. "He thinks on this matter before your honorable committee as hundreds of thousands of other citizens think."

Again the audience applauded delightedly.

"You may proceed, Mr. Craydon," said the chairman.

He did. He talked for two hours. Mayor Kendall, listening, marveled at the grasp

he had of every in and out of the subject, whose details he had probably never thought of until two nights before. He had Kendall's expert's figures on physical valuation at his tongue's end, and he knew what each side had claimed as the value of good will and other intangible assets, and he analyzed these things so that the popular mind could understand them.

His conclusion as to what valuation Mr. Shortridge's company ought to be allowed was startling. He did not say that four millions would be entirely unfair—that was cleverly left open—but he implied that much less would be no injustice to the corporation. If the committee admitted all his contentions, it would concede the Eddsfield Gas and Electric a valuation of hardly more than two million and three-quarters.

And he did not neglect the people.

He painted pictures of their inevitable and interminable gas and electric bills, sealed at a high price forever if the committee failed to do its duty by them. He referred to the public as usually inarticulate, but now, for once, determined to have justice. In such a manner that the audience delightedly understood every reference, but so indirectly that the committee could not rebuke him without appearing absurd, he implied what might happen in a future election to legislators who failed to listen to the people's voice. He intimated that no doubt already the committeemen had heard from their constituents, and the expression on half of their faces assured them they had.

He told them he had no hesitation whatever in leaving the matter in their hands, for he knew they were honorable men. Perfectly courteous were his words, yet he succeeded in giving the phrase precisely the meaning Mark Antony gave it at the burial of Cæsar. He closed with a peroration of ringing eloquence, and the old hall quivered with the applause that followed.

"Do you wish to be heard further, Mayor Kendall?" Senator Jersey asked, when the uproar died.

Kendall had no desire to match his oratory with Craydon's, on the same day and before the same audience, but neither was he willing yet to close his case.

"We have a few additional matters we wish to bring to the committee's attention," he said. "They will not take long. Perhaps to-morrow morning——"

Attorney Leeds, who had listened to Craydon with a professionally amused smile on his lips, nodded. "We also will be prepared to close to-morrow morning," he told the committee.

"We'll be here!" somebody yelled far back in the gallery, and there was a murmur of agreement. The crowd purposed to see the thing through to its finish.

The newspapers spread the scene and the speech all over their front pages. They also mentioned that Eddsfield Gas and Electric stock had gone off to ninety-eight.

Then to Kendall, late in the afternoon, came Weaver Shortridge, alone.

"I've been talking over long distance to Web Judson," he said, "and he tells me you are the doctor in this thing, without reservation. I want to ask you a straight question: Can you call off Craydon?"

"I don't know," the mayor told him, with a tone that implied he meant he didn't know until he heard more.

"If you can, I am ready to make you a proposition. There's no sense in my company and the city being at odds. In the interests of harmony——" He broke off at the look on Kendall's face, and exclaimed candidly: "Oh, thunder! What's the use of not talking straight? You've stirred up too much of a mess. We're ready to compromise. If you can call off all the dogs——"

"It might be possible."

"Good! I'm prepared to sign an agreement with you, to present to the committee when it comes together to-morrow morning, to the effect that both my company and the city of Eddsfield accept five millions as a fair valuation."

Kendall laughed. "And well you might," he said. "I'll agree on four."

Shortridge made argument. The mayor shook his head. "Four," he repeated.

"We'll shave it a little," the corporation president conceded, after more argument and another refusal. "I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll stand for four and three-quarters."

"Four flat," insisted Kendall, "and not one cent more. It is more than fair, and you know it and I know it."

"But Judson said four and a quarter——"

"That was some time ago. We've been to a lot of work and expense since then."

"I'll come to four and a half, and that is my last word."

Kendall rose. "The last word it is, then. At this minute I'll agree to four. At any later time I shall stand out for the three and

a half we've been claiming before the committee—and Craydon, I presume, will still be asking two and three-quarters."

Shortridge studied the younger man's face as a poker player studies his opponent.

"Have Desbro here in half an hour," he gave in, "and I'll get Leeds. They can draw up the paper."

When the famous corporation lawyer appeared he shook hands with Kendall and said sincerely: "My congratulations, Mr. Mayor." He was a really big man.

"Make it simple," Kendall instructed City Solicitor Desbro, who would have taken two thousand words to say it in, if he had been encouraged. "A few lines will do. We agree on four million dollars, with no qualifications on either side."

Leeds bowed agreement. "I assure you I shall not try to put in any joker," he promised. The lawyers fell to work.

Kendall had always heard Shortridge spoken of as a sporting person—an amiable winner and a good loser. He admired, now, the philosophy with which he took defeat.

"You tell Web Judson if he grins the next time he meets me, I'll be tempted to hit him," he grumbled, not ill-naturedly. "I'll be remembering that double contribution I've got to make next fall without his rubbing it in. Did he mention it? You're thinking, I imagine, that the next time you or Judson tell me where to get off doing business with that little old machine of yours, I'd better listen. Well, so am I."

Kendall was young, and he could not resist his opportunity:

"I'm a well-meaning young man," he said, "but I wouldn't have got very far if I hadn't had the people back of me."

David Leeds looked up from the table, smiling. "Vox populi, vox Daley," he remarked. "But that doesn't detract from your credit for thinking of him and getting him to do it. I suppose you know that while his able lieutenants were keeping things moving up there at the State House—Lord! you wouldn't have believed six or eight men could have engineered all that noise!—he picked up sixty or seventy thousand dollars in the market on Eddsfield Gas and Electric."

"From you?" Kendall asked Shortridge.

"Some of it. Mostly from others, thank goodness! However—— All ready for us to sign? Pass me that pen, please."

He and Kendall affixed their signatures to the triplicate agreement.

"However, as I was saying, having made eighty thousand dollars a year for an indefinite number of years during the last two minutes, I am not going to lose any more sleep than I have to over what happened in the market."

Kendall stared at him in amazement. "In the last two minutes?" he echoed.

Shortridge grinned cheerfully.

"Of all the icy-footed creatures in Christendom, the worst are politicians—nice old conservative ones," he declared. "They tremble and their teeth chatter when their constituents say 'boo!' We got an inside tip an hour ago, Leeds and I, that a majority of those jellyfish on the corporations committee had decided to vote to-morrow to fix our valuation at three millions."

The next number will have another Eddsfield story.

CLASSED AS UNIMPORTANT

FRANKLIN K. LANE, former secretary of the interior in the Wilson cabinet, was asked by a club acquaintance last month for his opinion as to how the next administration would turn out.

"Oh," said Mr. Lane good-naturedly, "these predictions are always unreliable, unimportant and to no purpose. Whenever you indulge in them, the fellow on the other side tells the story of what the little girl got when she waked up at three o'clock in the morning and said: 'Mother, tell me a fairy tale.'

"'It's too late for me,' replied mother. 'Father will be in shortly, and he'll tell us both one.'"

Goliath and Delilah

By Roy Norton

Author of "David and Goliath," "Old Harmless," Etc.

Goliath would do a lot for David. He was even willing to give him up to a woman and live the rest of his life without him. Only he wanted to be sure that she was the right woman

THE heart of Goliath was troubled, and, inasmuch as he was a giant in size and his cardiacal organ in exact proportion to his bulk, it constituted a full-grown ache. Worst of all, David, his partner, was the cause; for David, the misogynist, distrustful of all women, hitherto proof against beauty, blandishment, and blarney, forty years unscathed, usually level-headed and entirely unemotional, had met a "widder."

Worst of all the "widder" was young, coquettish, full of snap, and carried an eye that never slept nor failed to discern the main chance. To make the situation more difficult and hard to digest, she was anything but bad looking, was abundantly able to care for herself, knew the value of clothes and fripperies, and—worst of all!—was a most accomplished judge of the idiosyncracies of the male sex. In the vernacular, Mrs. Gertrude Smythe, "Late of Fifth Avenue, New York" was "All there!"

The "widder" blew into Georgetown, that staid, settled, well-conducted village that in the course of years had succeeded a mere mining camp up in the Sierras, and astonished its fifteen hundred inhabitants by sticking in her tent pegs. She knew how to do things. She rented the store next to the post office that had stood vacant for so long that cobwebs on the windows had for more than four years cut off a view of the interior. She cozened the owner, a "town uplifter" and well-fattened dame, whose deceased husband had been lucky in finding gold, into bedizening the property with real show windows. They weren't of plate glass, but the glass was good, and, after the glaziers had set it, and Gertrude took possession, and filled in the background with a few hats and a gown or two, those who went to the post office could not be unaware of it.

They had to take notice, because Gertrude was there with bright colors, and while men might blink as if blinded, the women of the town invariably paused to look and admire. There had never been such feathers and plumes, such furbishings and furbelows, as were shown by Gertrude Smythe, "Late of Fifth Avenue, New York," in that new window of hers.

The shop windows of New York seduce the passer-by, but the windows of the Bon Bouche, in Georgetown, "knocked 'em dead." Married men took one glance, hurriedly shielded their eyes with one hand, clutched a tight and anchoring hold on their pocketbooks in their pants with the other, and rushed past, fervently hoping that "maw" or "sweetheart" or "the old woman" might not wander that way. The "widder" hadn't much stock inside her shop, but what she had, including herself, was mighty expensive. A lot of people in Georgetown, including not only lady customers, but many men, married or hoping-to-be, learned this within a few months after her advent.

David had gone from the partners' mine on the Big Divide to buy two mules and a wagon, because the property owned by the partners was developing steadily and promisingly. He stood outside the window and, round-eyed, curious as to what things some women wear, and perfectly idle and contented, paused on his way to a pie counter where he had intended to stuff himself. The "widder," who had been looking out through the cracks between imitation plush curtains in her show window, saw him and laughed.

"Come here, Fanny," she said to her assistant. "Do come and have a look at the funny little feller that's gawkin' in at the hats. Did you ever see such a man! Most as broad as he is long. And what awfully big shoulders. Got red hair, red complexion, red eyebrows, red eyes, red hands, and a red necktie."

Fanny, a local product, came and peered and said, "Law, miss! Ain't you never seen him before? That's David Field, and—I wish I had his money! Him and his pardner, so they say, has got the best claim over in the top. I heard as how fifty thousand dollars couldn't buy it."

"Um-m-mh!" said the widow. "Fancy an ugly little runt like that being half owner of something worth fifty thousand!" She stopped, her eyes clouded with what might have been either a thoughtful, or rapacious look, and then asked, "Do you know him?"

"Of course I do! All of us who lived here all our lives do. He's an awfully bashful man. But paw likes him."

"Oh! A friend of your father's, is he?" said the widow, quite as if making some mental resolution. "You ought to go out and speak to him, my dear. One never knows. Maybe he'd like to buy a hat for somebody."

And the shop assistant, Fanny, nothing loath to get away from trimming hats, or running a sewing machine for the next ten minutes, plunged outward and engaged David in conversation. Engaged him so successfully that he was scarcely aware when the widow also appeared in the doorway and was introduced and took part in the conversation. The widow was shrewd. She was an opportunist second to no other blandisher. Her discerning eyes discovered that the end of David's necktie was slightly ripped, a fact that he had not observed, and she insisted on his coming in while she took a stitch in it.

"You men are such careless creatures," she said, which it must be admitted was a highly original remark. "You know if you would stitch a thing the minute it loosens, you'd save a lot of trouble. I've some silk thread that'll just match that. Come inside. I can't sew it here on the street, can I?"

And David, the hitherto impregnable, took a step toward ruin as he awkwardly followed his decoy into the mysteries of the millinery stronghold.

"By heck!" he said admiringly, as her deft, cool fingers plied a swift needle almost under his nose, "I couldn't of done that job at all. I reckon I'd just naturally throwed my nice red necktie away when it had ripped a little farther." And what he did not express was that the widow's eyes, demure, also flattering, were, he thought, about the handsomest eyes he had ever accidentally looked into.

"I orter pay you fer that work, mum," he said, after she had deftly retied his necktie, with her fingers now and then more or less accidentally caressing the skin beneath his chin. He thrust his hand into his pocket, but she laughingly refused remuneration for such a tiny service as that—and David noticed that her teeth were very fine, her lips a lovely red, her chin nicely rounded. His case-hardened heart, hitherto as nearly feminine proof as a generous heart well could be, took on a little faster speed as he wondered what it might feel like to kiss this attractive combination. He was almost ashamed of himself for the temptation, probably the same as Mr. Saint Anthony was, and, like the saint probably did, he blushed. The widow looked away; but—she knew she had him!

David was a man of action. Just one hour later he returned to that hat shop bearing the biggest box of chocolates he had been able to find in Georgetown. And the widow accepted it with as much delight as if it were the first time she had ever looked upon a chocolate while it was brown. David no longer felt annoyed because all the mules he had seen on the market did not exactly meet with his approval. He considered it a duty he owed his partner, Goliath, not to be too hasty in the purchase of mules.

A day or two's delay in Georgetown might prove more profitable than a hasty purchase of second-grade stock; also a peringrinating picture show was due in town that evening and the widow assisted him by urging that surely he wasn't going to miss an opportunity like that. Whereupon David promptly promised that he would stay in town to see the pictures, if he could have the pleasure of taking both Fanny and the widow with him to the performance. Likewise he saw them home—Fanny at one end of the town and the widow at the other—Fanny first.

"It's lovely! Perfectly lovely that we are to have a picture show here regularly every Wednesday afternoon and night, after this," said the widow. "But it's a pity you don't live here. I hate going to pictures with women, and women only. It's been so nice to be with you to-night."

"Then—by gosh!—I'll be here in this camp every Wednesday night after this!" declared David. And the widow shyly edged a little closer to him and said that would be "*so* nice" of him.

When David returned to the mine Goliath

was somewhat surprised to see that not only had he bought a whopping pair of mules, but that behind the wagon he was leading rather a likely looking horse.

"Thought I'd buy the nag, too," David explained, "so's when we want to go anywhere in a hurry we can have him handy to ride."

"What's the matter with ridin' one of them mules?" Goliath asked.

"Feller I bought 'em off of said they wa'n't saddle broke," said David.

Goliath laughed loudly.

"Good Lord! Since when did either you or me git so feeble we couldn't bust in anything on hoofs to ride? However, I reckon maybe a pony'll come in handy, anyhow. And now that we're workin' four or five men, it ain't much more work to care for an extry animal when we've already got two."

On the first Wednesday when David made an excuse of business to go to Georgetown, Goliath thought nothing; but on the third Wednesday excursion, he began to suspect that Georgetown was not altogether a business center. And to confirm this, he discovered that David was becoming singularly reticent about these trips.

The cat escaped from the bag on the fourth Wednesday, during David's absence, when a Georgetown friend of the partners happened past the mine and, lolling over his saddle, said to Goliath with a grin, "Where's Dave? Reckon he's over to camp as usual a rushin' that widder to the movies, ain't he? Whole blame town's asmilin' over the way he's got a standin' order for ten pounds of candy every week. My old woman goes into that hat shop regular now, because Mrs. Smythe's got so much candy on hand she gives it away —just like a free lunch, I reckon.

"Got to hand it to her though, that she's some hustler! Durned nuisance the way she's upset all the women of our town. Sort of a hat race they're runnin', since Gertrude came. My old woman ain't satisfied with nothin' any more, and she used to git along right comfatably with a couple of hats a year. Now she buys 'em by the month. But—pshaw!—— What's the difference? That's a woman's way of havin' a right good time, and my old gal helped me to make all the money I got, so I ain't growlin' none. But think of old Dave gettin' spooney—at his age! It sure beats the band, it does!"

The loquacious one was not aware that after his departure the giant, instead of returning to work, trudged to the cabin which the partners still held sacred to themselves, sat on a bench, rolled a cigarette, and gave way to an unusual despondency. David had kept a secret from him! David, who had been his partner through thick and thin, for so many years, over so many thousands of miles, through so many dangers where "life was a gamble and death a joke." And now——

What Goliath thought of Gertrude Smythe at that moment wouldn't have flattered her at all. He fought it out with himself, and decided that if he was to lose his partner, it couldn't be helped. But he recalled a somewhat painful experience of his own when he had fallen into the clutches of a most heartless but seductive young señorita in a Mexican town, and therefore conceived it to be his duty to make investigations concerning the worth of one Gertrude Smythe lest David grab a gold brick that was merely gilded lead. But how to assure himself on this point was, to his unsophisticated mind, a terrible problem. It would require a lot of consideration. And Goliath gave it.

David returned, as usual, and, as usual Goliath asked no questions. He waited for his partner's voluntary confidence; but David, enamored, bashful, and somewhat ashamed of the fact that at last he had a secret that he could not share with Goliath, said nothing. It was then that, like a forlorn hope, Goliath remembered his and David's mutual friend, Morgan, formerly head of the detective department of the San Francisco police force, and recently lifted into the higher sphere of chief of the Federal secret service for the State. In his perplexity Goliath made a frantic and impetuous resolve to go to Morgan and ask for his advice.

"Dave," he said one evening, "I'm sort of hankerin' to take a lay-off. Things are runnin' so smoothly here, now, that they can get along for a few days without us, can't they? Suppose you and me take a run down to Frisco and loaf around a while with all the fellers we know? What say?"

At first David appeared to be in accord, and then Goliath saw the sudden thoughtful look that came over his face, the hesitation, the secret reluctance to miss a Wednesday evening, and the shake of his head.

"No, one of us orter be here," he said. "That new drift is too good to be left with-

out one of us watchin' it. But, say, pardner!—why don't you go down and have a lay-off? You've been stickin' on here all the time and sawin' wood, and I've been——" He stopped, as if somewhat conscience-stricken by the recollection that, once a week, for some time, he had left everything to his partner and meandered.

Goliath sighed. He was momentarily wounded by his partner's deception, and then recalled that a man in love is neither entirely trustworthy, nor blameworthy.

"You wouldn't mind if I went for a week, would you, pardner?" he asked.

"I'd miss you like all get-out; but just go ahead and go!" said David.

And so, still worried and troubled, Goliath journeyed alone.

In San Francisco he was joyously hailed by Morgan, whose great advance in position seemed not to have altered him at all. Into his interested, if amused ears, the giant poured his tale and voiced his woes, freely, and in a most homely way. And Morgan's eyes twinkled with a greater understanding than Goliath surmised, for the veteran detective knew that strange love of the partners, each for the other, and could conceive what any such violent change in their lives might mean.

"Goliath," he said, exploding in a series of chuckles, "you're an old fool. If Dave wants to get married, he's certainly got a right to go to it. But——"

"The 'but' of it," growled Goliath, "ain't got so much to do with Dave's gettin' married so much as it has to do with who the hell it is he's marryin'. That's what I'd like to know. If this here Gertrude Smythe's a plumb good one, I'm for her as far as I can go. But I'm hanged if I want my pardner Dave to horn in on somethin' that'll hurt him. There ain't no woman too good for Dave, and I ain't met none good enough. He's all man, Dave is. And what I come to talk to you about was to tell me how I can make sure—dead sure, mind you!—that he ain't bein' bunked by some old she-tartar that'll make life a misery for him after she's got him hobbled so fast that he can't move his hocks without hoppin'. Don't you see, I want to find out who this Gertrude Smythe is, and all about her, before I hand the best pardner a man ever had over to her and say, 'Well, I'm goin' to hike it alone after this; but God bless you both!'"

Morgan looked at him for a time, shook his head, turned toward his desk, and with a smile of amusement twisting the corners of his lips, said, "Well, Goliath, it's easy enough to find out all about this woman. It's not exactly in my line, at present, but I'll give you a note to a private detective who makes quiet investigations, if that will do you any good, and he'll find out all about who and what she is—from the time she was born. Will that do?"

"Yep! Just the thing!" said Goliath gratefully.

An hour later he had explained his mission to a businesslike man in a private office who had listened patiently and politely, but who secretly regarded the quest as a joke.

"What you want to know is the full record of one Gertrude Smythe, of Georgetown, but you don't want any one to know that such inquiries are being made. You want a full, fair, and impartial report. Now, an inquiry of that kind might cost——"

"Never mind the cost!" interrupted Goliath. "Morgan told me you were a fair, square man who wouldn't sting me for anything more than you are right to claim. I expect to pay for the work. I want it done well, even if, as you say, you might have to send a special man. I want to know all about Mrs. Gertrude Smythe!"

He emphasized each word with a hard forefinger tapped down upon the detective's desk, after which he jerked a wallet from his pocket and counted out a thousand dollars in bills.

"There," he declared, "is enough to go on with, ain't it?"

"Half of it should be more than enough," said the detective, counting the money and handing back five hundred dollars. "If there is any left above our expenses and fees, I'll return it to you. I'll send a man to Georgetown to-night, and I'll have him report to me personally. Then I'll write you."

"For the Lord's sake don't do that," Goliath exclaimed, in a panic. "Dave and me always sees each others letters. I'll meet your man in Auburn at the Planters' Hotel on Wednesday afternoon two weeks from now, and will pay the expense. I can fix up an excuse to get away from David on that day, I reckon. Wednesday's my pardner's day out."

Goliath was almost furtive when he reached the mine back up in the hills again. He brought presents for every man on the place and a gold cigarette case for his part-

ner, on which was engraved, "Yours forever, Goliath." But it was in vain that he tried to salve his conscience. David, however, buoyed on the clouds of love, was totally unconscious of his partner's spiritual gloom, and dwelt, laughingly, hopefully, dreamfully on Wednesdays, all the other days of the week being but blanks to be endured.

And when, at the appointed time, during Dave's absence in Georgetown, Goliath repaired to Auburn, he was well-nigh uncertain as to his own wishes concerning the promised report. He was resigned to the loss of his partner, to future loneliness and heartbreak, if the report convinced him that this Gertrude Smythe, widow, was worthy of that human pearl-beyond-price, David.

The detective was waiting. He was entirely aloof and unsympathetic. He carried the bored attitude of a man who had been given a job to do, had done it without fear or favor, and was remorselessly persistent as to facts. He was methodical. He was convincing. He had his findings all tabulated in a sheaf of typewritten papers, which he consulted and read while Goliath, the giant, bent forward and stared at the carpet with one great hand cupped behind his ear as if suddenly grown deaf, or extremely desirous of being certain that he had heard every word aright. And what he learned was this:

That Gertrude Smythe—originally Mary Jenkins, had been born in a small Iowa town some thirty-six years previously, where, until the tender age of sixteen, she had assisted her widowed mother in making hats and millinery; that Gertrude had graduated from the town, her mother, and the millinery business with a drummer whom she thoroughly trusted because he wore pearl-buttoned, cloth-topped shoes and she had known him a week. She had been married five times, three times for love and twice for money, but her financial judgment had been wrong. She had possessed herself of five thousand dollars through a breach-of-promise suit brought against an octogenarian whose family wished to avoid further proceedings, and with that had emigrated to Georgetown where she had hopes of picking a plethoric one. Otherwise her character was without a blemish; sweet, lovable, thrifty, well house-broken, and she had never done time.

"Of course the papers are yours," said the detective, when he had finished.

He folded them carefully and tendered them.

"I don't want 'em," said Goliath.

"Better keep 'em to refresh your memory. You can bet on 'em. Our firm backs up all its reports in court, if need be."

Goliath took them and put them in his pocket.

"There's a hundred and twenty dollars and fifty-four cents coming to you," said the detective. "Like to look over the account?"

"Nope," said Goliath as he accepted the check and signed a receipt. "But I think I'll keep the records just—just to show a feller what a fool he is for marryin' somebody he don't know about."

"Oh, that's the way of it, eh?" said the detective dryly. And then, thinking it not amiss to give cynical advice, said, "Yes, that's so. Now take idiots that advertise for wives, or husbands, too, for that matter—in the matrimonial-agency papers. They——"

"What? What's that?" questioned the giant, suddenly lifting his head with a display of keen interest. "What's a matrimonial agency?"

The detective, amused by Goliath's innocence and ignorance, explained the workings of those institutions for the lovelorn, while the giant glared at him.

"Say," he said. "Do you reckon you could send me some of them papers? I'm—I'm sort of curious about 'em."

"Certainly," said the detective. "Hold on a minute! I think I've got one or two of them in my suit case that I bought to look up another inquiry, and they're of no further use to me."

He went across to his suit case, pulled it open, and then said, "Yes, here they are. You can have 'em. Don't believe anything you read in 'em. They are used either by idiots, or people who want to catch a sucker and get money without work." He slammed the suit case shut and looked at his watch. "Well," he said, "I'm glad you're satisfied with our inquiries. Got to hustle now and catch my train. Leaves in fifteen minutes. Can just about make it."

Goliath saw him depart from the hotel, waved his hand, and then thoughtfully seated himself in a chair on the deserted veranda, and became mightily interested in reading the matrimonial market news. Finally he stared vacantly, for a long time, at the drowsy street, and then got up and reëntered

the hotel. He sat down at a desk in the writing room, and very carefully wrote something that he prepared to mail, inclosing therewith a new dollar bill. It was an advertisement carefully patterned after some of those in the matrimonial journal, and read:

Young and attractive widow, financially independent, proprietor of established and well-paying business in Western city, seeks husband. Money no object, but love and company craved. Man must not be more than thirty-five years old. Blonde preferred, and would like man to be handsome and a good dresser. Send photo and particulars to Box ——, Auburn, California.

Goliath then sauntered to the post office, rented a box, filled its number into his advertisement, and mailed his letter.

Two weeks later, on Wednesday afternoon, the infatuated David again went to Georgetown. The dust of the trail had not died down behind his pony's heels before Goliath was on his way to Auburn. He found several letters awaiting. An even less astute observer than Goliath could have judged the character of the applicants not only by the letters but by the photographs they sent in proof of their charms. Evidently there were quite a lot of gentlemen under thirty-five who were willing to marry to avoid future work and financial worry. One of them, the handsomest of all, was a barber who suggested that, perhaps, the "well-established business" referred to could be enlarged to have a commodious barber shop of which he might take charge if the advertiser had sufficient money to fit the plant up to his taste.

Goliath looked long and thoughtfully at this applicant's photograph. It displayed a youngish man with a splendid mane of hair combed back in waves and folds, and a brow that would have done credit to a poet. Also, the applicant had large, dreamy eyes, and a lovely mustache, and he surely looked as if he loved beautiful clothes, collars, and cravats. He modestly stated in his letter that he was a "swell dresser," and, that if only he could get the movies to give him a chance, he would undoubtedly be the greatest motion-picture actor in the world in no time at all. Goliath's big hand came down with a slap on his knee.

"That's him! He's it!" he exclaimed to himself. "Um-m-mh! Lives in the Mission down in Frisco. I'll send him a ten-dollar bill to be at the hotel here in Auburn next Wednesday. It's sending the cash that'll do the trick with that bucko! Sure! He'll think it's easy—and, by heck, it is!"

For the ensuing week Goliath's sole fear was that David would get himself engaged before any action could be taken; but David was bashful, had his partner but known it. And the widow, convinced that she could land him at any time that suited her convenience, was also playing for time, desiring to make certain regarding David's financial prospects, and the valuation of the mine, before committing herself. And these two points, owing to the rare reticence of the partners and their habit of strictly minding their own business were not very easy. At least four times she had been compelled to put a damper on David and twice he had nearly got her cornered where she couldn't escape. Each time the smitten David vowed that the next time he'd make her say "yes," or "no," and his determination increased with each rebuff.

When Goliath again went to Auburn, he saw sitting on the hotel veranda, a most immaculate young man, clad tastefully in a black and white checked suit, with a necktie that would have made a chorus girl blink, a pair of patent-leather shoes with tan tops, silk socks with yellow embroidered clocks, and toying with a cigarette held between very white fingers, upon one of which shone resplendently, a magnificent paste diamond. An equally magnificent paste pearl was in his cravat.

An equally splendid paste gold double chain was festooned across the Lothario's slender chest. A self-satisfied smirk, not at all paste, twisted the corners of the young gentleman's full-lipped mouth, and now and then, when not ogling some passing girl, he tenderly stroked his mustache and fondled the tips thereof as if anxious to preserve its immaculate shape. For a full five minutes Goliath walked around him examining his points, and then seemed satisfied.

"He's the goods! He's the prize baby, all right!" he said to himself. "I'll bet my money on him. Here goes!"

He sauntered over and seated himself in the vacant chair alongside his catch, was treated to a would-be haughty stare, and then leaned across and rumbled, in a confidential tone, "Young feller, you're Percival Harold Jones. I know you. Got your picture here in my pocket. You're the feller that's come to grab the widder."

For a moment there was an agonized look on the face of the erstwhile haughty one, but Goliath said, in the utmost friendly tone, "Don't get fussed up. It's all right. It's all on the square. I put that ad in the paper, and I sent you that ten because I got a widder that I'm hankerin' to get off. In fact, I'm willin' to pay to get her a good husband, young and handsome like you. I'm doin' it to keep her from marryin' a nasty, dirty, squatty, ugly-tempered, fightin', cantankerous, red-headed little runt that's after her hot and heavy, and I'm afraid has got her goin'. Get me?"

For a full minute Percival Jones stared wide-eyed at the giant, and then a sly glint came into his eyes, and with a look of conceit, he said, "Oh, I see! Case of jealousy, is it? Can't get her yourself, and so you don't want the other chappie to get away with it, eh?"

His sneer betrayed his contempt for this big mountain rube who wore a blue flannel shirt and whose hands indicated much contact with picks, drills, and hard mother earth. Goliath's face did not in the least betray his impulse—which was to nab this impertinent coxcomb by the scruff of the neck, swing him around, and kick him hard, just to see how far away he could land him.

"You got it, mister," he said, looking away to hide his grin. "Hit the nail on the head. So now we can talk business. You don't give a cuss about the whys and wherefores, do you, if I can deliver the goods? No? I didn't calculate you would. Could tell that by your looks."

His auditor didn't know whether to be pleased or not by Goliath's tone, but wisely decided to hold his tongue.

"I'm makin' the conditions," said Goliath firmly. "They go like this: First, you ain't never to let nobody know the whole inside of this show. Nobody! Get me? Because if you ever do, I'll hunt you down and fill you so damn full of lead that it'd take a ten-horse derrick to lower you into your grave when they plant you! Now—second, if you take this job on, I'll put up the money to keep you goin' over in the town where I'm goin' to send you.

"You must stop in the best hotel, buy ten pounds of chocolate drops and such folderols about every third day, and you got to wear swell clothes all the time, and go in to win. Third, on the day you carry this widder to the matrimonial pen, and get her double hitched and hog tied and branded so's she can't get away, I'll give you two thousand bucks in hard, cold cash. And after that—savin' that thing about keepin' your yawp shut—you can go to hell as far as I'm concerned.

"Got it all straight? Now here's the rest of it: I'm goin' to give you an hour to think it over. My name's Leath—though down here most folks call me Goliath. You can go to anybody you like to—anybody! The folks that run this hotel—the banks, the sheriffs, the judges—it don't matter who, and ask 'em if my word's good. Then if you take this job on, I'll start you off with a hundred dollars to pay first expenses. After that it's up to you—all but this. You got to marry this widder in just one month, or—you're off my pay roll for good and the deal is finished.

"I don't care how you play your cards. You can be a Eastern millionaire out here for his health, or a artist lookin' for things to paint, or a picture actor restin' from his hard labors or runnin' away from clamorin' females. Maybe the last would be the best, because as far as I've got it doped out you don't have to spell, nor read nor write, nor know anything at all to be a hero on them films. All you got to do is to look pretty and think you know it all. That's two things in which you shine like a ten-pound gold nugget on a wet clay dump. I'm givin' you a chance now to think it over and ask all about me. Be back in just one hour. So long!"

Just one hour later Goliath paid into the white and unstained hands of Percival Harold Jones one hundred dollars, and saw him off on the stage en route for Georgetown, after which he returned to the high hills to watch results.

They were chronicled in successive Wednesdays. On the first Wednesday, David went blithely away, but on his return showed signs of thoughtfulness. On the second Wednesday, David rode away with a grim face, but returned looking distressed. On the third Wednesday, David rode reluctantly, as if doubtful and in fear, to return considerably cast down, uncommunicative, given to long spells of brooding and scowling and abrupt manifestations of ill temper. On the fourth Wednesday he came home very early, quite as if terribly ennuied.

"Hello!" said Goliath, when his partner at an unexpected hour came into the cabin.

"Home early, ain't you? You told me you liked to go over there to see them movin' pictures. Got tired of 'em—or has the machine gone busted?"

In sudden and uncalled for exasperation David turned around and banged a fist on the table until the lamp above it, beneath which the giant was calmly reading a yellow-backed novel, fluttered and leaped as if in terror.

"Don't you ever say nothin' to me about pictures again!" he roared. "And what's more, I hate fellers that act in 'em. Hate 'em? I hate their guts! All of 'em, and the good-lookin' ones worst of any of 'em. They ain't to be trusted, they ain't. But milliners is the deceivin'est of all. I'm plumb tired out, and I ain't ever goin' to that damn hole—Georgetown—again. I'm—I'm goin' to bed."

"What's women and actors and milliners got to do with your takin' a trip to Georgetown?" calmly inquired Goliath, never looking at his partner, but idly turning the pages of the novel he was holding high above his face as if slightly bored.

But David disdained answer. Goliath got it in the columns of the *Weekly County Bugle*, on the following Saturday night. The account ran:

CHARMING WEDDING OF WELL-KNOWN SOCIETY FOLK.

Last Thursday, at eight o'clock p. m., in the mild evening, there was celebrated in the Zacarial Methodist Church an event that set the society of our thriving and important city agog, the union in holy bonds of matrimony of Mrs. Gertrude Smythe, the well-known proprietress of the Bon Bouche Millinery Store, late of Fifth Avenue, New York, and Mr. Percival Harold Jones, the distinguished film artist, who, owing to unfortunate and, we trust, temporary ill health, has been compelled to sojourn in our midst seeking recuperation. Mr. Jones is so enamored of our fair city that he announces, exclusively through the columns of the *Bugle*, which is admittedly the county organ, that he contemplates abandoning his art and becoming a permanent resident. It was a very recherché affair, and the church was filled with the elites of this, the queen city. As that distinguished society leader, Mrs. Mark Himberg, wife of the well-known proprietor of the World Emporium, said, "The tout ensemble of the whole is perfect." It was. The organ pealed. The dainty bride, blushing, was led to the altar by her chief assistant, Miss Fanny Fosdink, in the absence of any male relative. The bridegroom, handsome, débonair, and as modest as if he were not one of the world's rich and famous celebrities, was backed by the proprietor of the Palace Hotel as best man. After the solemn words were said by Reverend Willgham Binks, the happy couple departed by special automobile to catch No. 47, the local flyer from Auburn, for the purpose of spending their honeymoon in Sacramento. But the bridegroom's wealth and generosity were proven by the fact that all guests at the wedding were the recipients of a magnificent wedding supper at that widely known hostelry, the Palace Hotel, where it was much regretted that the bride and bridegroom, owing to force of circumstances, could not be present. Their health, happiness, and future prosperity were toasted in champagne thoughtfully provided by the bridegroom, after which there was a dance, all the guests retiring with long wishes for the marital felicities and continued prosperities of our distinguished fellow townsmen, Mr. and Mrs. Percival Harold Jones, in which the *Bugle* most heartily joins.

Goliath read the account through on that Saturday night, looked over at the door leading into David's room, crumpled the paper into a knot, and threw it on the floor.

"All of 'em drank champagne, did they? And he give 'em a banquet! And I got to pay the whole blamed bill! Wonder what that stuff costs?"

Then, slowly, his ill humor vanished. He leaned back into his chair, sprawled his sturdy legs out in front of him, clutched his hands behind his head, and sighed with a great content.

"I don't give a cuss what it cost!" he thought at last. "I'm glad to pay. Dave's still my pardner—and—Dave's cheap at any price!"

SAYING IT SOFTLY

WASHINGTON society passes around every few weeks a new "Wilsonism." Here is the latest: Mr. Tumulty, the president's secretary, had just told Mr. Wilson of a wild and unfounded criticism of the administration by one of its bitterest foes.

"That," said the president, "bears upon its face the persuasive odor of its own improbability."

When Dynevor Died

By William Morton Ferguson

Author of "The Guilty One," "Apple Green," Etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Morney goes to Pinelake to work as a chemist for Rutherford & Co., makers of patent medicines, and while walking along a road with Hamlet, a stray dog who has adopted him, times an automobile and a few minutes past seven sees it crash into a telegraph pole. Running to the wreck, he finds a woman dead at the wheel, and Jill, Rutherford's daughter, stunned. Doctor Dicksee arrives, tells Morney that the dead woman is Mrs. Dynevor, and they all go to the Dynevor home, where Tomlinson, the butler, tells them that Mr. Dynevor died of apoplexy at exactly seven o'clock. Morney finds some whisky in a glass, is suspicious, and takes it away in a bottle. On his way home he is attacked, and when he recovers consciousness some days later in the hospital, Doctor Potts tells him that he was robbed of everything he had in his pockets, including the bottle. Smith, a detective, calls on him, and he learns that Dynevor's first wife was Rutherford's sister, and that Rutherford is related to Amos Hammersley, Pinelake's leading citizen, with whose son, Caspar, Morney has had trouble. Upon Morney's return to his boarding house, Gabriel Poynter, a lawyer, attempts to bribe him to say that Mrs. Dynevor was killed before seven. While on his way to Sunday dinner at Rutherford's, he meets Jill, after having sustained embarrassing injuries to his clothing in a fight with Skelly, the dog catcher.

(A Four-Part Story—Part II.)

CHAPTER VII.

GOOD afternoon," said Morney, doffing his hat and holding himself very erect, the split gloves placed back to back. "Hope I'm not late. The woods are so beautiful on such a day——"

"Late for what, sir?"

"Why, for dinner. I'm going to dine with you, you know."

"No, I don't know. Is this another of your peculiar ideas—to come without an invitation?"

"Well, I always like to be neighborly. But your father did invite me, you know."

"I wish you wouldn't keep saying 'You know,' when I don't know. I know nothing about it. Why on earth should my father invite you?"

"I'm rather wondering myself."

"He does some queer things occasionally," said Miss Rutherford. "I remember he once even invited an ex-convict for dinner."

He was silent, a suggestion of pain in his set lips as if something she had said wounded deeply. Instantly she turned to him, her eyes contrite and the color flaming in her cheeks.

"Mr. Morney, I'm a beast! I know all you did for me that night, and I've never even thanked you or mentioned about your being in hospital; I've done nothing but act as nasty and rude as I know how——"

"Oh, nonsense——"

"No, it's not. And nobody knows better than myself just how abominable I can be, even when I don't want to. I didn't know, that night of the accident, anything about what you'd done, but I learned afterward; and yesterday I meant to call and thank you. I did know your address and it wasn't an accident my passing the house. I meant to be decent, but when I saw that dog—they said it was your dog that found me, but I never imagined it was *that* one, for I thought him dead and you told me he wasn't yours——"

"Neither he was. But he came to life just after you'd gone, and I'm going to keep him."

"And—and then," she went on, "I don't know how it was, but you made me mad; you always seem to be making fun of me. And I didn't know you were coming for dinner to-day, and that made me mad again. My father's always too busy to tell me anything till it's all over. And—now I think I've confessed everything, and I apologize and I thank you for all you did that night, and I hope you've entirely recovered from that assault, and I'm sure I'm very pleased you're going to dine with us, and I hope you like Pinelake and that you'll get on well

in your new position and—and I think that's all."

"For which please accept my most profound and reverent thanks."

"Now you're laughing at me again. That's what makes me so darn mad—to be treated as if I were a child——"

"And aren't you?"

Miss Rutherford drew herself up to the full majestic height of her five feet nothing. "I was eighteen this month. Yes, I am—even if I did forget momentarily what *canis familiaris* meant. That's something else I owe you."

"Something else you must forgive me for, Miss Rutherford. I'm afflicted with a dislocated sense of humor at times, and I really thought you were only about fourteen. These abbreviated fashions are so misleading. But now that I can see the crow's-feet and the gray in your hair and realize your tremendous age——"

And so they came to the little white bridge, where the girl paused. "That's the Hammersley place," she volunteered, pointing with her sunshade to the distant gable of a red house faintly discernible among the trees.

"Oh, is it?" Morney glanced at his watch. "Hadn't we better be hurrying? Your father——"

"Pooh. He told you, I suppose, that we dine at two sharp? We don't; it's a movable feast, for he's never on time himself. Too busy, even on Sundays, to be punctual. Very often he forgets to dine at all; and so would I, if I couldn't eat any more than he does. No, we've plenty of time, and I must do the honors and point out all the places of interest; the Hammersley's is one of the show places. But you don't seem a bit enthused."

"Somehow I could never get excited over a bird's-eye view of a gable. And I don't know the family. Do you?"

"Of course; they're sort of relatives in a way. You see, Mr. Hammersley was a first cousin of my uncle, Mr. Dynevor. His first wife—I mean Mr. Dynevor's—was my aunt, so that makes us a sort of distant something or other by marriage several times removed. I hope you understand, for I never did.

"And speaking of the Hammersleys reminds me of a rather amusing story that Casper Hammersley told me happened the other day. You know this end of the lake belongs to them; well, he found a tramp, as cool as you please, stretched out under one of those trees and fishing for the prize trout. He had even brought his dog with him, a nondescript savage animal that he called a Great Dane. He became abusive and insulting when Casper informed him he was trespassing and politely asked him to go; and he ended by setting the dog on him."

"Really? And what happened then?"

"Why, Mr. Hammersley grappled with the animal and just then his bull terrier, Buster, appeared. He flew straight to his master's assistance and, although outweighed by at least twenty pounds, gave that dog a most terrible mauling. The tramp then tried to maim Buster and, when Mr. Hammersley interfered, he set upon him with a cudgel. And so, although he was a regular giant of a man, Mr. Hammersley flung him into the lake and threw his dog in after him. They crawled out and sneaked off, and I don't think they'll ever try to poach there again, do you?"

"I should think not. Your friend Mr. Hammersley must be a very formidable character."

"Oh, yes, he's very strong and brave. He held a lieutenant's commission and served in France. Perhaps you may have met him, for I understood from my father that you were over there, too."

"Yes, but France is fairly large, and so was the crowd. I didn't meet Mr. Hammersley."

"Then you must; you'll have a lot to talk about. He saw an awful lot of fighting, you know, and had such wonderful escapes. It's quite thrilling to hear him. Won't you tell me some of your adventures, Mr. Morney?"

"I hadn't any. And what little bit of fighting I saw I'd rather forget."

"You aren't a bit obliging. I just love to listen to war stories; true ones, I mean. But, of course, every one can't have gone through what Casper Hammersley did. By the way, what breed of dog is that one you've adopted?"

"A Spanish beagle. Didn't you ever hear of the breed? One of their peculiar points is the Hapsburg under lip."

"And Spanish influenza, I suppose. I don't believe you know anything about dogs or what he is," said Miss Rutherford as they left the bridge. "You might just as well call him a Great Dane. Anyway, don't let him get mixed up with Mr. Hammersley's Buster. Buster has an ugly reputation. He can't help it, for he comes of bad fighting stock. There are some men who are beasts

enough to fight dogs for money and what they call sport; and, though I don't know how true it is, I've heard that more than one such fight has taken place not far from here. Of course, Mr. Hammersley, when he bought Buster, didn't know he came of pit stock, and he's doing everything to break him of the habit. Buster killed a French bull pup of mine, and I can't forgive him, though his ancestors are really to blame, or rather, the men who trained them to fight like that. I only wonder that that poaching tramp's dog escaped with its life, and I wouldn't like to see anything happen to your—Spanish beagle."

"Thank you," said Morney. "I'll keep him away from this unhealthy neighborhood." And he changed the subject to one in which he was more interested. "You were saying that the Hammersleys and the late Mr. Dynevor were cousins. Are they then next of kin?"

"Yes," she replied indifferently. "Mr. Dynevor had no other blood relatives."

Morney smiled, thinking of his momentary and absurd suspicion concerning Samuel Rutherford, while the girl went on to speak of the accident.

"I don't know what I should have done, if I'd been really to blame, or even at the wheel; it was bad enough to hear Doctor Dicksee insinuate what he did. I suppose people are saying that anyway I shouldn't have allowed Mrs. Dynevor to go so fast; but she was an old hand at the wheel and knew there was little or no traffic on that bit of road at that hour; also, that it's well lighted and that there are no crossroads. And who would have thought of a blow-out with brand-new tires?"

"Yet the fact remains that a car driven at the legal rate doesn't get into trouble."

"Oh, it's easy enough to criticize and to be wise after the event."

"I'm not criticizing. I used to do a bit of speeding myself, and I became an expert at making all sorts of excuses; it was always the bad road or light or some fool pedestrian, never myself. If Mrs. Dynevor hadn't been doing fifty miles an hour——"

"But she wasn't!"

"But she was, for I was clocking you."

"Pooh!" said Miss Rutherford. "That was impossible."

"No, it wasn't, thanks to my knowing how those lights are spaced. Let me show you." And he stopped and drew a diagram on the road with his cane. "Those are the lamps, you see, and I was standing here where this cross is. It's midway between—between—er—midway——"

"What's the matter?" exclaimed Miss Rutherford. "Are you ill?"

Morney had suddenly straightened up, his expression one of marked apprehension. So interested had he been in executing his diagram that he had forgotten completely about the Plimsoll line and the edict against stooping. He now experienced a horrible fear that one of the safety pins had gone adrift from its moorings and that, moreover, his companion had witnessed the disaster.

"N-no, I'm quite all right, thank you," he said with a somewhat sickly smile. "But I'm—er—no good at diagrams and—and shall we walk on?"

"There's no use trying to hide it, Mr. Morney; I *saw*."

"H-hide—er—what, Miss Rutherford?"

"The fact that you're ill," she said, with the utmost concern and to his profound relief. "Is it an old wound?"

Morney suddenly understood how the celebrated Uncle Toby must have felt when questioned by the Widow Wadman; but he embraced the suggestion. "Yes, I was—er—torpedoed. Where? Oh, in the Mediterranean. No, I really wasn't killed, and the splinter, or whatever it was, did more damage to my clothes. But once in a while when I go to stoop over I'm sort of—er—reminded of it. However, it's nothing to speak about." All of which, he reflected, was symbolic of the truth.

"I just knew you'd a lot of thrilling adventures and escapes," declared Miss Rutherford triumphantly. "You must tell me all about it."

"I'm more interested just at present in this matter of Mrs. Dynevor's death. You know, I suppose, that I must appear at the inquest. You and I are the only witnesses and, it seems, opposing ones. I'm sorry that circumstances have so arranged it that it will be my painful duty to contradict you flatly, Miss Rutherford."

She wrinkled her brows. "I don't understand. I think contradicting me comes easily and naturally to you, so far as that goes, but why should we necessarily be opposed on this particular matter?"

"Because, don't you see, there's the question of time. As I explained, I can be in no possible doubt when the accident happened;

you are prepared to swear that it was before seven——"

"How do you know what I'm prepared to swear?" she demanded.

Morney had no desire to retail his interview with Gabriel Poynter, quite aside from the fact that he knew it would be impossible to substantiate a charge of attempted subornation of perjury. As the lawyer had been careful to arrange, there were no witnesses to the abortive bribery, and he could easily ridicule such a charge. To Morney the whole thing was merely an unpleasant incident, and he saw nothing to be gained by speaking of it.

"That was my impression," he said. "If I'm wrong, I'm very glad to know it."

"Well, you are wrong. And I don't see how or why you should get such an idea. I haven't discussed it with any one but my father and, in fact, we've been discussing it ever since. Dad gets preconceived opinions about things and, as you've seen, I'm not without some opinions of my own; the result is that we often squabble fearfully. I dare say it may give a wrong impression to outsiders. I'd no idea at what time the accident happened, but it was my belief that it must have been after seven; my father argued, on the other hand, that it must have been before——"

"What reason had he for thinking that?"

"Oh, he doesn't have to have reasons for his arguments," she laughed. "Often it's enough, if I say one thing, for him to say another. But he based his argument on the time Mrs. Dynevor and I left town. He figured it all out that the accident must have happened just about seven, and he had almost convinced me of this. But I know now that I was right from the first and that it happened after seven. Nothing can alter that conviction.: If my father had only known about your timing the car, he wouldn't have been so positive—but here's dad now." And she waved her parasol at the limousine that had turned into the avenue from a side street and was evidently on its way to town.

To Morney it seemed as if Rutherford was not only surprised but somewhat disconcerted at the meeting; his eyes, gleaming like fresh drops of ink on the yellow parchment of his face, darted from Morney to the girl and back again. "Thought you were in Cranford, Jill," he said, mentioning a neighboring town. "Why didn't you go?"

"Oh, I changed my mind," she replied airily. "And where are you off to at this hour? I understand that you asked Mr. Morney for two-o'clock dinner; it must be nearly that time now."

"Not at all," said Rutherford, pointing to the clock on the dashboard. "Ten minutes yet. Remembered I hadn't given you the address, Mr. Morney, and thought I'd meet you on your way here. Daughter seems to have done it for me."

"Yes," said the girl, as she entered the car. "It was too nice a day to waste in Cranford and I took a walk instead. Mr. Morney and I happened to meet, and when I learned he was to be our guest, I decided of course not to go to Cranford at all."

"But you're expected. You must go."

"I'm not expected. And, under the circumstances, my place is at home. You forgot to tell me you had invited Mr. Morney."

"Yes, slipped my mind," nodded her father. "Anyway, thought you wouldn't be here."

Although nothing further was said, and nothing was to be learned from Rutherford's manner, Morney couldn't escape the impression that his employer had had no intention of informing his daughter about the invitation, and that he would have much preferred her to keep the Cranford engagement; that, in fact, he would have insisted on her doing so, had they been alone or she less accustomed to having her own way.

This, coupled with what the girl had said regarding her father's belief as to the time of the accident, caused Morney a vague uneasiness and discomfort. Somehow his former suspicions were returning even though they now appeared more absurd than ever. For even though close friends with the Hammersleys, and related in a sense, why should Rutherford, in the matter of the Dynevor estate, interest himself in their behalf to the extent of inducing his own daughter to give false evidence?

That was manifestly ridiculous. And yet Morney waited with something approaching anxiety for the girl to broach the subject of the accident and her conversion to her initial belief that it had happened after seven. But apparently she had forgotten the matter, and it bulked trivial in her mind, for she made no mention of it. And presently his thoughts were directed elsewhere by a question from Rutherford.

"Believe you mentioned something about

being on the outs with your father," said the little man in his abrupt fashion, apparently giving no thought as to how Morney might feel at discussing the matter before the girl. "What was it about?"

"A personal matter, sir."

"Hum—ah—yes. Well, spats between relatives seldom amount to anything; generally all noise and smoke. Dynevor and I had many a dust-up, but never anything serious until he went and married again. Piece of infernal foolishness. Yes, and more than——"

"Dad!" expostulated his daughter.

Rutherford shrugged. "Well, Mr. Morney, hope it's nothing serious between you and your father."

"I—er—hope not, sir."

"Climbed your high horse, chucked your allowance and all that, eh?" pursued Rutherford inquisitively. "Going to live on what you earn? Well, it never did a man harm; all the more fit to go back and take hold when the time comes."

Morney's face was set, and he looked highly uncomfortable. He made no reply and showed unmistakable relief when the girl suddenly broke into the conversation and changed the subject.

"I declare, dad, you've got on your blessed wig hindside front again! The parting's coming down your spine."

"Drat the thing," ejaculated her parent, giving the wig a violent tug.

Miss Rutherford turned to the colored chauffeur, a behemoth with cowlike eyes and a sleepy smile that split his sable face in half, disclosing a graveyard of dazzling tombstones. "Augustus," she said severely, "you must have seen that it was on wrong."

"Oh, yes'm. But, Missy Jill, yo' pappy most ingenibally wears it that a way, and Ah done thought he preferred it."

"So I do," snapped Mr. Rutherford. "Free country and my inalienable right to wear it any way I please. Quit fussing over me, Jill!"

"I'm not going to have you made a laughingstock, dad, by all the fools that don't know you. There, it's all right now." And she replaced his Panama and kissed him soundly. "But I'm sure I don't know why you persist in wearing the hideous thing."

"Business," snorted her parent. "Nice thing if the proprietor and discoverer of the 'Tonic' went round with a bald head. Ever think of that? Believe I'll have my photo on the bottle, with the wig and without, and the signed statement, 'See the change in me.' Strict truth, too; not my fault if they think the tonic did it." And he winked at Morney.

"You're perfectly shameless," declared his daughter. "And to hear you talk sometimes any one would imagine you did nothing but sell fakes and that all you thought about was money."

CHAPTER VIII.

As Doctor Dicksee had intimated, the Rutherfords' house was on the Merrion Road about half a mile to the north of the Dynevor's. Morney, who had expected a costly and poisonous pile that would harmonize with his employer's taste in dress, was agreeably disappointed, for it proved to be no stucco atrocity, but a nobly planned and executed dwelling of the true colonial type. For several reasons it was the most prominent house not only in the town, but county and State; it stood amid several acres of parklike ground, crowning a gently rising eminence, and from its windows one had an uninterrupted view of the distant river and bay. Its simple dignity, its air of quiet and repose, somehow reminded Morney of the place where Washington spent the peaceful evening of his life.

Perhaps nothing could have been more incongruous than the house and its owner, the little wizened figure, in rakish Panama, frock coat, and ready-made tie; one would have thought that, surely, they could have nothing in common. But the house was the pride and glory of Samuel Rutherford's soul and he chuckled quietly at Morney's admiration and astonishment. It was his peculiar pleasure to watch its effect on guests of taste and discernment.

"Something out of the ordinary for a patent-medicine man, eh?" he said. "Didn't think I'd have an eye for this sort of thing?"

His thoughts had been read so accurately that Morney flushed. "It's great," he said, eying the vista of shade trees. "Your daughter was saying that the Hammersley's was one of the show places, but it couldn't beat this. It reminds me of Mount Vernon."

"That's its name," nodded Rutherford, rubbing his hands and quite evidently delighted. "Yes, Hammersley has a fine place, but not like this; every man to his taste. This is one of the few places where the great Wash-

ington actually lived; you'll find it full of genuine relics. D. A. R. wanted it. I got there first. Ambitions in every man's life, Mr. Morney. This stands for one of mine. Remember as a barefoot boy vowing I'd own it some day, restore its native beauty and grandeur. I did, though it cost me a pretty penny."

The interior of "Mount Vernon" fulfilled the promise of its exterior, the hand of modern progress replacing but not defacing, and Morney was conducted by an old colored serving man to the "cloakroom." Rutherford, murmuring some excuse, had vanished and his daughter found him in the library upstairs, the desk telephone at his elbow. At her unannounced entrance he pushed aside the instrument. "Well," he smiled, "suppose you've come to pick a bone in private because I forgot to mention I'd invited that young man?"

"I don't think you forgot, dad. You don't forget many things, unless you want to."

"Well, that's true; forgot purposely. Wouldn't have asked him, if I'd known you were going to be here. Difference between asking a man to dinner and to meet your womenfolks."

"What nonsense. This isn't like you, dad. Is it because of Mr. Morney's quarrel with his father?"

"Not at all; though, for that matter, think he should have told me the why and wherefor of it. Gave him opportunity enough."

"Evidently he has his own reasons for not doing so. I've come to speak to you about this, to ask you not to question him any more. I could see that it hurt him and that he couldn't bring himself to discuss it. It's nobody's business——"

"Maybe everybody's, mine particularly. May have robbed his father, for all I know."

"Oh, certainly," she laughed. "But why did you engage him then, if you'd any such doubts? He didn't hide anything; he told you he'd quarreled with his father and didn't wish to trade on his name."

"I know. I know," Rutherford drummed on the desk. "Engaged him strictly on his merits; excellent degree and papers."

"Yes, and you said you'd never met a person you liked better on sight; that he was all you'd wish a son to be. You know you did. And now you turn round——"

"Not at all; nothing to do with it. But I repeat it's one thing to ask him here and quite another to have you present. Gives a different look to the whole thing."

"I don't see it and you don't either. Don't be stuffy, dad. And, by the way, what are you paying Mr. Morney? Because I think he's hard up. At least he has a hole in his trousers."

"Eh? What are you saying? Will you ever grow up, girl?"

"I'm simply telling you what I've seen. His fine appearance is all camouflage, for his gloves are burst, too. And then look where he's boarding. So it's quite evident he's on his own and taking nothing from his father."

Rutherford pondered, scratching his head until the wig hung over one ear. "Pay him more when he's worth more. Good salary; no reason to go round in rags. Must have been on the rocks before he came here. Nothing to me who his father is; want a reputable and efficient employee, not member of Almanach de Gotha. Run along now; some business to attend to. Be down in a minute."

The fictitiously bright dinner was in reality a dull affair that could have appealed to none but an epicure or gormand bereft of all finer feeling. Morney's healthy appetite was dulled by the vague sense of impending trouble that had been hanging over him all day, and by the belief that he was not wholly a welcome guest.

Dinner over, Morney found himself alone for a time with the girl on the veranda. "I'm afraid," he said diffidently, "that I've succeeded in spoiling your day, Miss Rutherford; that you very kindly allowed me to interfere with a previous engagement."

"Oh, you mean my going to Cranford? Not a bit of it," she laughed. "There was no definite arrangement and my father knows it. You mustn't mind what he said. As I told you, it's quite enough sometimes if I take up one position for him to take up the opposite. You heard what he said about Mr. Dynevor? That's a case in point. You mustn't imagine that all his ideas are so narrow that you'd think he'd been brought up in a folding bed; but he seems to think second marriages are wicked—he didn't marry again himself, you know. He thinks the whole question of marriage is treated far too lightly these days, that people look on it as a game where the loser has only to throw down his hand and call for a new deal."

"I believe there's some truth in that; that

there are those who think it a game of grab and, if they draw blank, they can get a divorce or have it annulled and try over again. And I do think we're inclined to be in too much of a hurry, that we don't properly consider the gravity and responsibility ..."

"Why, you talk as if you were a hundred years old!" she laughed. "So you don't believe a man should marry again?"

"I suppose that's something every one is best qualified to answer for himself. But it seems to me if the marriage has been a failure a man has had his chance and doesn't deserve another."

"But, my goodness, if the failure wasn't his fault?"

"But it takes two to make a failure just as it takes two to make a success."

She considered a moment. "I think that's one of those things that sound awfully profound but, when you come to examine them, don't really mean anything. You know perfectly well there are some people nobody on earth could make a success with. And there's such a thing as total incompatability of temperament."

"Then they shouldn't have married," said Morney. "Our grandparents couldn't make an excuse of that kind; they took plenty of time to know whom they were marrying; that's what courtship was for."

"Who wants or needs a courtship of years and years? If it took all that time for a man to find out he loved me he could keep it. I won't say our grandmothers hadn't any minds to make up, but they didn't dare call them their own. They didn't even know the blessings of leap year. When I fall in love, if I ever do, it will be plump off the springboard and head over heels and the lucky man had better watch out! If he's at all backward and bashful—well, this is leap year."

"What nonsense are you talking now?" inquired her father, appearing in the doorway. "Hello—who's this?" he added, as an automobile turned into the drive. "I think—yes, it's the Hammersleys."

Amos Hammersley proved to be an older and fuller edition of his son Caspar; here the promise of the paunch was magnificently fulfilled, while the failing chin merged into a sort of pelicanlike pouch. Here also were the same eyes resembling dried currants, the heavy shoulders, curly hair, and lips that looked as if smeared with fresh blood. One could see a distinct resemblance between father, son, and the late James Dynevor.

"Hello, Amos," greeted Rutherford effusively.

"Been out for a breather—there's nothing like exercise—and thought I'd drop in on my way home," rumbled Mr. Hammersley as he pried himself loose from the seat. "But if you're entertaining——"

"Oh, it's all right; come on in. This is Mr. Morney, the employee of mine that helped Jill night of the accident, you know."

"Oh, is that so?" And Mr. Hammersley offered a patronizing pulpy hand. But his son merely nodded; he gave no sign that he had ever seen Morney before nor did the latter show the slightest recognition.

Mr. Hammersley went indoors with Rutherford, and his son took a seat close to the girl. He showed every evidence of intimacy, calling her by her first name and embarking on a flood of small talk, dealing with neighbors and friends, that effectually shut Morney out of the picture. In fact, so far as Caspar Hammersley was concerned, Morney might have been part of the veranda railing against which he was leaning. Several times the girl sought to make the conversation general but was foiled, though without apparent design.

"Caspar," she said finally, "I was telling Mr. Morney that you and he should find a lot to talk about. He saw service in France, too, you know."

Hammersley reluctantly became aware of Morney's presence. "Indeed? What regiment, may I ask? Oh, the marines," with a faint smile. "I dare say you fellows have knocked around the map a good deal. Ever happen to be in Scotland, Mr. Morney?"

Morney fumbled with his cigarette holder. "Yes, I've been there."

"Nice place," continued Hammersley, still with that faint smile. "Some quaint institutions and customs. Been in Edinburgh, Mr. Morney? How did you like it? Some very fine buildings there, don't you think?"

"When were you ever there, Caspar?" asked the girl.

He laughed. "Did I ever say I was there? As a matter of fact, the nearest I got to Edinburgh was London; still you can learn a good deal about a place without being there, just as you can find out about people without actually knowing them. But if you want firsthand information about Edinburgh, you'll have to ask Mr. Morney."

She had only to glance at Morney's face in order to guess that something unpleasant was in the wind; whatever the cause, he was plainly in a highly uncomfortable position and felt it keenly. And to add to his embarrassment, he was evidently in doubt as to whether there existed a hidden meaning in Hammersley's seemingly careless remarks, or if they were as innocent as they appeared. He could find nothing to say and, good Samaritan that she was, she came to his aid.

"Oh, I know all about Edinburgh," she said. "There's a Prince Street and a castle that Stevenson wrote about in 'St. Ives,' and an old palace where Queen Mary lived. I'd rather hear some firsthand information about France. Perhaps, Caspar, Mr. Morney could help you to remember the name of that town —you know, the one you saved by learning the plan of attack."

It was Hammersley's turn to look uncomfortable. He fumbled with his collar and coughed. "Oh, he wouldn't know; the marines were in a different sector," he said hastily. "And it doesn't matter; it was a mere episode."

"Oh, but I think it was such a wonderful thing, Caspar; deciphering the cryptogram, capturing the armored car, and fighting your way back to our lines—well, I'll spare your blushes, but you're far too modest. By the way, and to change the subject violently, did that poaching tramp and his dog ever pay a return call?"

Hammersley looked as if he would have found great pleasure in choking her. "No," he said shortly and, making the excuse of throwing away his cigarette, he got up. "I say, Jill, come around to the garage a minute; I want to show you something new in the way of tires. Got 'em yesterday. If you'd had them that night, I guess there wouldn't have been any accident."

Rutherford appeared at this moment. "Come in, Mr. Morney, and see the museum, those things I was telling you about."

The museum, as Rutherford called it, was a large square room, off the library, and admittance could be gained to it only by way of the latter. It contained perhaps everything imaginable pertaining to the Revolutionary period, including articles once used or possessed by Washington or lesser figures. Amos Hammersley was seated before an open cabinet, apparently absorbed in its contents, for he didn't look up as they entered. Two high windows commanded the back premises and, happening to glance out, Morney saw Jill Rutherford and Caspar Hammersley examining the latter's car.

Rutherford had become quite talkative, even going so far as to employ the proper quantity of pronouns and verbs; he unlocked cabinets, took down weapons and flags from the wall, brought out books and pictures with all the gusto of a showman. "Not at all, it's a great pleasure," he said when Morney protested at all the trouble he was taking. "I'm glad to find you interested. Mr. Hammersley's a great student of the period, too; he spends hours in here."

Morney, glancing over to where the student sat at the other end of the long room, reflected that he disguised his scholarship admirably. He was still staring, in a seemingly comatose condition, at the same array of coins.

"Make yourself entirely at home," urged Rutherford. And presently he left the room and closed the door.

Hammersley lumbered out of his chair, apparently only aware of Morney's presence. "Oh, hello!" he nodded. "Very interesting collection, eh? I never get tired of looking at 'em. Where's Mr. Rutherford?"

As he came down the room, his dewlap swinging, Morney, noting the low forehead and grizzled curly hair, short neck, and thick shoulders, thought of an overfed Assyrian bull. He wondered in what business the Hammersleys, father and son, might be engaged, and at the marked intimacy between them and the Rutherfords that could hardly be explained by the very distant relationship. Rutherford was self-made, and by no means flawless, but he seemed of finer clay than this man.

Hammersley opened the connecting door, went through the library into the corridor, and then returned. "Guess he's having his little after-dinner snooze," he said, closing the door. "Little weakness of his and he likes to sneak off without disturbing folks. Have a cigar?" He produced an ornate case. "Oh, prefer a pipe, eh? Well, smoke up. My boy's off with Miss Rutherford—saw 'em go—and there isn't a better time for a quiet little talk. It's about that visit Poynter paid you. I guess you know he's my lawyer, eh?"

"Yes, I learned it to-day."

"Well, there's no mystery about it; merely an oversight if Poynter didn't mention it. Of course, I didn't know about his visit to

you, and from what I understand he made a bit of a mess of it. Managed to get your back up, eh?"

"No," said Morney, "he was more amusing than anything else."

Hammersley's little black eyes narrowed unpleasantly for a moment. "A sense of humor's all right if it ain't—isn't overdone. Now, look here, Morney," aiming a stubby finger, "your know how things stand and you've had time to think 'em over. I can be an enemy or friend and a pretty good one either way. But don't you get the idea I'm to be milked, though I know how to return a favor; no one better. If the case goes to court, I'll win it hands down, of course, and it's simply in your power to save me some possible trouble and expense, no more or less."

"I'm sorry, but there's no use discussing this, Mr. Hammersley; my answer is the same as I gave Mr. Poynter, and nothing can change it."

Hammersley sat back, his eyes satiric. "Nothing, eh? Not if we happened to talk in thousands instead of hundreds?"

"Not if you talked in millions. Money can have nothing to do with it, sir. You've no right to place me in this position. It's not a question of obliging or disobliging anybody."

"Oh, yes, it is. And I guess I know maybe what's put your back up. My boy thrashed you the other day for trespassing; yes, he told me all about it. Of course, he didn't know at the time who you were and you deserved it, for that matter. You shouldn't have any hard feelings or cut your nose off simply to spite your face."

Morney laughed suddenly. "Let us not discuss this any further, Mr. Hammersley; it's quite useless."

Hammersley got up, his face slowly purpling. "All right, Mr. Morney, suit yourself," he said, chewing viciously on the black cigar. "That's the attitude we're pleased to take up, eh? We're a highly moral and eccentrically virtuous young man! Why, you hypocritical young jailbird——"

"What's that?" Morney wheeled, his face livid and his hands hard knots.

CHAPTER IX.

Hammersley's violent temper, easily aroused and now in flood tide, put him past all thought of physical fear; moreover he was accustomed to such scenes, to hector and browbeat, and his fundamental brutality became more evident as he raised his voice and shook a stubby menacing finger.

"Jailbird! That's what I said!" he exclaimed. "Think I don't know what happened in Scotland and why your father kicked you out? And then you come here and try to play the saint! Poynter was funny, and I'm funny, too, eh? Well, we ain't a patch on you!"

"I see, Mr. Hammersley," said Morney, with the ghost of a bitter smile. "I rather wondered at Mr. Poynter's assurance in coming to me with his proposal."

"Yes, I guess you wouldn't have felt quite so insulted if you'd known what we knew. It ain't my way, young man, to go into things blindfold. You thought because that little business happened three thousand miles away, and your father was able to hush it up here, that nobody knew anything about it. And, of course, you forgot to mention it to Mr. Rutherford. D'you think you'd have got the job if you had? D'you think you'd keep it five minutes if he knew? And I guess maybe you haven't considered either all it means to become a witness in court. How do you think your standing as a witness will compare with Miss Rutherford's?"

He smiled grimly, his eyes bright with malicious triumph, as he contemplated Morney who stood silent and with bowed head as if reviewing the unlovely past and what exposure would mean. Hammersley's triumph seemed so complete a thing that his temper began to cool, his wounded susceptibilities to heal.

"Now, look here," he continued at length, "I ain't a hard man, unless put to it, and I guess I'll give you another chance, Morney. I don't need any favor from you, and it's in my power to break you, not only throw you out of your present job, but make it blamed hard for you to get another. But I'm willing to give you another chance; it ain't my way to hit a man when he's down, and I can make some allowance for ignorance. You didn't know Amos Hammersley or what you were stacking up against. Well, now you know, and I guess we won't have any more trouble. You be good, and I'll overlook——"

"You go to the devil, sir."

"What's that?" roared Hammersley, looking as if he were about to burst a blood vessel. He stammered and waved his cigar. "Y-you mean you won't—you refuse——"

"Yes, that's what I mean; that and a good deal more." Morney, in direct contrast to his opponent, froze outwardly when inwardly at white heat. "You're not only crooked, Mr. Hammersley, but the would-be source of crookedness in others. You're not only a rascal, but a mean and cowardly one. I could say a great deal more, sir, if you were a younger man."

Hammersley's speechless rage was quite alarming; so overwrought was he that he jammed the lighted end of the cigar into his mouth, then flung it through the window with a curse. His purple complexion became mottled and, after making several futile attempts at speech, he lumbered across the room and tore open the door. "Sam!" he bawled. "Come in here a minute!"

At this moment Rutherford was entering the library. "What's up?" he asked. "Lay down for a moment and must have dropped off. Very sorry. Now, what's wrong, Amos?"

"I want to tell you something about this fine new employee of yours," said Hammersley, aiming a menacing finger at the silent Morney. "I want to let you know the sort of young man you've been inviting to your house and introducing to your daughter. In the first place, do you know what he's done?—tried to shake me down for a couple of thousand! He made the proposal right here to me in this room that if I came across with two thousand he'd testify at the inquest that Mrs. Dynevor died when she did—before seven o'clock; if I didn't pay him that he'd swear it was after seven. Now, what do you think of that? Can you beat it?"

Morney was so unprepared for this outrageous flank assault, and it was delivered with such force, apparent sincerity and righteous indignation, that he could do nothing but stare while Rutherford looked his astonishment.

"Do you get the idea, Sam?" pursued Hammersley. "This bright young fellow thought he saw a fine chance of making a little easy money on the side. He didn't know about your daughter's evidence——"

"Why, you thundering scoundrel," cried Morney, "it was you who tried to bribe me!"

Hammersley eyed him in a pitying manner. "Is that the best you can do? Obvious, I guess, but a poor game—and I'll show you just how poor it is. Maybe you'll be saying next that my lawyer tried to bribe you, too? You've got nerve enough for anything."

He smiled sardonically and turned to Rutherford. "Now, Sam, it's my duty to tell you something of this fellow's record, and if he dares to deny it I'll prove it up to the hilt. It's no wonder he didn't care to tell you why he quarreled with his father, the truth being he was disinherited because of something that happened over in Scotland. He's done time in an Edinburgh jail."

"What!" cried Rutherford.

"Let him deny it if he can," said Hammersley. "And the best part of it is that he was sent up for the very thing he had the nerve to accuse me of—subornation of perjury! Yes, sir; tried, convicted, and sentenced. But that ain't all; there was a woman arrested with him, a woman with whom he'd run off from London. I guess the less said about that part the better."

"Is—is this true or not?" demanded Rutherford in a trembling voice. "Come, answer!"

Morney raised his head. "It's true I was sent to jail, but——"

"But, of course, you were framed, eh?" sneered Hammersley. "It was a put-up job or you didn't get a fair trial? I guess Scotland's notorious for that sort of thing."

"I've nothing to explain to you, Mr. Hammersley."

"No, nor to any one else. There's no explaining away the record of the sheriff's court. Now, Sam, I've done my duty and the rest is up to you, of course. I knew all this when you engaged him and, it not being my way to hit a man when he's down, I'd have let you find it out for yourself, if he hadn't tried to gyp me. And you've heard him turn round and try to accuse me—*me*, mind you—of subornation of perjury! If I was a hard man, I'd have you jailed, young fellow."

"You must leave my employment, Mr. Morney," exclaimed Rutherford, walking the floor excitedly. "Can't tolerate for a moment such conduct. Most astonished and upset. Must ask you to leave the house at once. Give you two weeks' wages in lieu of notice, though not entitled to it. Further discussion quite useless. Very sorry. Good afternoon."

"And look here, young man," said Hammersley, aiming the menacing finger anew, "you repeat this fairy tale outside, you even dare to whisper that I tried to bribe you,

or any piffle like that, and I'll have you up in court so quick it'll make your head swim! You'll find that this town ain't any easier on your sort than Edinburgh."

Perhaps no higher testimonial in the matter of discipline and self-restraint could have been accorded the "shave-tail" school, and Morney's subsequent tutors, than his bearing throughout this interview. Of the three men he was easily the most composed, although the supposed villain of the piece. Ignoring Hammersley completely, he now walked to the door in silence, bowed to Rutherford, and passed from the room and house.

Shortly afterward Jill and Caspar entered the library; the girl was flushed, her eyes very bright as though with fever, while her companion looked rather sullen and uncomfortable. Hammersley, senior, was sitting on his shoulder blades in a big leather chair and smoking the eternal black cigar, while Rutherford still paced the floor.

"Well, you two got back early," said Hammersley, with a paternal smile. "Thought you'd make an evening of it at the country club. What's the matter? You and Jill been having a spat?"

His son shrugged and fondled the failing chin. "Oh, Jill didn't want to go."

"Pshaw! You young fellows have no gumption these days. Never ask a woman what she wants to do, just go ahead and do it. You can bet when I was your age, if I was alone with a pretty girl in a car ——" And Hammersley winked knowingly.

"Dad, why did Mr. Morney leave so soon?" asked the girl, ignoring this pleasantry. "And what has happened? We saw him near the turnpike, and he looked as if coming from the funeral of his last friend."

"Good reason," said Amos Hammersley. "Better tell her, Sam; no use trying to hide it or making a martyr of him. My boy knows, of course."

Rutherford did not look at his daughter; he walked the floor, flinging fragmentary sentences over his shoulder. "Greatly deceived and disappointed in that young man. Blacksheep. Impossible to keep him in my employ. Most reprehensible conduct. Received a jail sentence——"

"Jail! A jail sentence for what?"

Her father waved his arms and sent his wig awry. "Oh, I can't tell you everything about——"

"Well, I can and will," put in Hammersley, senior. "She ain't a child, Sam, and some things had better be told. Mr. Morney, and a woman he was living with, were convicted of perjury and bribery. He's a bad egg and always was, unfit for decent society. Yes, it's entirely true." And he repeated the details he had given Rutherford, how Morney had been disinherited and how he had admitted the truth of the charge.

She took it all very quietly and almost with indifference which, considering her brief acquaintance with Morney, was hardly to be wondered at. "And how did you hear of this, Mr. Hammersley?" she asked presently.

Caspar answered. "It was I who first learned of it. I could have told you all this, Jill, only it wasn't a fit subject for your ears and I hate to carry tales. There was a short account of it in the London papers, and I saw it when I was over there. Although it didn't say so, I wondered if it could be George T. Morney's son, for they said he was very wild at college, and I'd heard some queer stories about him. I was curious enough to make an investigation, and I verified the truth of the account, and my belief that he was old Morney's son. Of course, I didn't give it further publicity."

Hammersley, senior, resumed the tale. "Caspar's acted very generously in all this; he didn't want to say anything, even to me, and yet he felt at the same time that your father should know, especially if there was a chance of Mr. Morney associating with you. He told me all about it this morning and asked my advice, and I said that it seemed to me I wouldn't be doing my duty by the family, and as your father's first friend, if I didn't lay the facts before him."

"That's why I simply couldn't be decent to Mr. Morney," added Caspar, "and why I suggested going to the country club. I couldn't say I didn't want you to associate with him, because I couldn't explain the reason why."

"And is that why you didn't want me to be here to-day, dad?"

"Not at all," put in Amos Hammersley. "How could that be? Your father knew nothing about all this until half an hour ago."

"Oh, yes, I was forgetting," she nodded. "How stupid of me. And you came over expressly to tell him, Mr. Hammersley? It was the reason for your visit?"

Hammersley waved his cigar. "Not at all. I didn't know your father would be in nor

did I expect to find that young man here. In fact, although I felt it was my plain duty to warn your father, I hadn't made up my mind; I certainly don't like to hit a man when he's down, and I mightn't have said anything but for an outrageous proposal—I suppose I'd better tell that, too, Sam?" And he did so without waiting for an assent.

"I say, you don't mean it!" exclaimed the horrified son. "Of all the nerve!"

Hammersley shrugged. "He's a stranger here and evidently didn't know who he was dealing with, or, perhaps, he doesn't care what he does for money. Once a man goes crooked he's apt to think everybody the same. And, of course, he was foxy enough to see that there were no witnesses; naturally, when I denounced him, he denied the whole thing and even had the humorous audacity to say that I tried to bribe him! You see, he didn't know of Miss Jill's evidence; he thought it rested solely with him to say when Mrs. Dynevor died and——"

"Oh, I want to say something about that," said Jill, turning to the silent Rutherford and speaking as if the whole conversation were of the most trifling importance. "That puts me in mind of it. I believe, dad, it was after seven when the accident happened."

This careless remark caused a distinct sensation, although heroic efforts were made to conceal the fact, and for several moments there was silence. Hammersley, senior, looked at Rutherford and son Caspar looked at both; then all three looked at the girl who sat swinging her feet and gazing dreamily out of the window.

"But—but, my dear," stammered Rutherford, "that's been all settled, you know. You admitted I was right——"

"Oh, no, I didn't, dad; I was almost convinced, but not quite. And now I know you were wrong and I right."

Amos Hammersley flushed darkly but managed to speak with playful gravity. "Of course, it's a woman's privilege to change her mind, but I guess you don't understand the seriousness of this thing, Miss Jill; you'll be going into court, you see, and the law don't allow you to say one thing one day and another the next. And you know the accident happened *before* seven——"

"But I don't and never did," she interrupted placidly.

"You did up to to-day!" exclaimed Caspar. "What's made you change your mind all of a sudden? It looks to me as if somebody had been talking to you, some not overscrupulous person with an ax to grind."

"And who could that be?" she asked, opening innocent eyes. "How absurd you are, Caspar. Why does it matter so much when the accident happened? Why all this fuss and why do you seem so put out?"

Again there was silence and again Amos Hammersley voted himself Speaker of the House. "Oh, none of us is put out; not at all." He cleared his throat, glanced at Rutherford, and added: "Of course you don't understand—hem—business matters. Miss Jill, still I think I'd better try to explain something to you even at this late day. You see the fact is, your evidence may happen to matter a great deal; it may even mean the difference between your uncle Jim's money being kept in the family——"

"You mean going to you?"

"Well, yes, of course; but we're all one family, as it were. As I say, being kept in the family where it rightly and properly belongs or going to a San Francisco orphan asylum."

"Really?" she exclaimed. "And why should that be?"

"I guess that pretty little head of yours ain't—isn't meant for legal technicalities," smiled Hammersley in his best paternal manner. "It has all to do with wills and codicils and things you wouldn't understand the half of; but what it comes down to is simply a case of who died first. If Mrs. Dynevor survived—which, of course, she didn't—she had the power to leave everything to this institution where, I believe, she was brought up."

"O-o-h," said Jill. "Dad, why didn't you tell me about this?"

"Couldn't," snapped Rutherford who had resumed his restless pacing. "Didn't want to influence you."

"That's right," nodded Amos Hammersley. "When your father happened to mention that you seemed inclined to be in some little doubt about the accident happening before seven, I said: 'Sam, we mustn't let her know the personal aspect of the thing for, of course, she'd a thousand times rather see the estate kept in the family where it properly belongs. Any right-minded person would. But she's got to come to her conviction fair and square, and I've no doubt what that conviction will be.' "

"Yes, that was very honorable of you,"

nodded Jill. "And I *have* arrived at my conviction unhampered by any personal considerations. I'm sorry the family must do without Uncle Jim's money, my conviction being that the accident didn't happen until at least five minutes after seven. And that is what I shall say in court."

The faces of her audience were a study, and Caspar turned sharply away to hide his. Amos Hammersley swore inwardly; he had grappled successfully with many a difficult opponent in his day, but this young girl, whom he still regarded almost as a child, was proving quite the hardest. She was thrice armed by innocence and ignorance—yet was she quite so innocent and unsophisticated as she seemed?

"Sam," he said at length with forced lightness, but giving that silent gentleman a surreptitious meaning scowl, "I guess maybe you can say something to this young party—show her that it's quite possible to do the family a good turn, and at the same time tell the truth. I've come across some people who have the queer idea that they must always benefit the stranger at the expense of their own folks—in fact, even go out of their way to do it. I hope that ain't—isn't going to be the case here."

"Dad," said the girl, ignoring this observation and compelling her father's eyes, "do you want me to go into court and swear to something that I believe in my heart to be false?"

"Oh, nonsense!" exclaimed Hammersley, senior. "That's melodramatic claptrap, you know; absolute skybosh. You've no right to put it that way, and I won't allow——"

"And I won't allow you, Mr. Hammersley, to tell me what my rights are, especially in my father's house." And she measured him with eyes that were anything but those of a timid and ignorant young thing. "It is my right to state things as they appear to me, and I don't need anybody to interpret them for me. I may be incapable of understanding legal technicalities, but I know when a lie is a lie. And now, dad, will you answer me?"

Rutherford's yellow and wrinkled face had grown pale, the brightness of his eyes dulled. He gave the impression of one who has fought and lost a long and tremendous battle, yet who has found in defeat something surpassing victory.

"That question doesn't need answering, my girl," he said. "You know I'd be the last one to ask you to do anything that your conscience didn't approve of. I see it's your honest conviction that the accident didn't happen till after seven; very well, there's nothing more to be said."

Amos Hammersley looked at him with cold and menacing eyes.

CHAPTER X.

Morney did a lot of thinking during his homeward walk from the Rutherfords, the result being a visit to Doctor Arthur Potts. Recollecting what the other had said as to the time he was off duty, he waited until after seven before starting for the hospital. He knew that Potts resided on the premises and was virtually the superintendent, the institution being too small to support one who could furnish purely administrative services. His quarters were on the ground floor of the south wing, reached by a door other than the main one, and it was to this private entrance that Morney went.

"Hello!" greeted the house physician heartily, answering the ring in person. "Very glad to see you." And he led the way to the office study where, to his surprise, Morney found the original John Smith taking his ease in a big armchair while he smoked a calabash burned almost black.

"I needn't introduce you two," said Potts. "This is our local old sleuth and known variously as 'Gumshoe Bill' and 'the man who talks about his mother-in-law,' the same being a mythical person. As a matter of fact, he's a confirmed bachelor like myself."

"Howdy," beamed Mr. Smith. "Don't ask me to get outa dry dock; fat folks can't afford to have no manners. Yes, my remarks concerning mothers-in-law may be what the French calls a jeu d'esprit, but, all the same, they're intended as a solemn warning to the young. Never get married but, if you can't help it, be sure and pick outa orphan. One woman's bad enough without marryin' a whole family. When you come to think on it all the trouble in life comes from gettin' married—and even orphans have their drawbacks. Now take Mr. Dynevor's case, which the doc and I were just talking of."

"I thought, from what Doctor Dicksee said, the Dynevors were happily married," remarked Morney.

Smith glanced at Potts, a small twinkle in his cushioned eye. "And what exactly did he say to give you that idea?"

"Oh, that if given the choice, they would have elected to die together. At the time I thought they'd been married for years."

The ponderous detective blew a ring of smoke at the ceiling. "Of course, any kinda marriage is a mistake, but when a man hooks up with a good-lookin' female young enough to be his daughter, it's sure asking for trouble. You should have seen Mrs. Dynevor before she got all smashed up like that; some looker, I tell you."

"But weren't they happy?" persisted Morney.

"How can any married folks be happy?" said Smith. "Dynevor, of course, was jealous."

"Now that's only talk," put in Potts. "If you believed all you heard in this town—— For instance, how true is it, Mr. Morney, that you've quit your job at Rutherford's?"

"I was telling the doc," said Smith as Morney stared. "It's pretty well around town."

"They seem to have a good news bureau here," commented Morney. "What else did you hear? Go ahead, don't mind me. I'd like to know."

Smith shifted his bulk uneasily. "Well, they say Rutherford gave you the bag because he'd found you'd done time in an English pen. I heard it from a guy who got it straight from young Hammersley at the country club."

Without further hesitation Morney told of Gabriel Poynter's visit and of the recent interview with Amos Hammersley. "Now," he concluded, "all that Mr. Hammersley said was true in a sense, except the part about my trying to shake him down. It's quite true that I've been disinherited, that I served a jail sentence in Edinburgh, and that a woman was involved in the case. It's a long and unpleasant story that I've no wish to relate at present. I was placed in a curious and difficult position, and I can only say that, under similar circumstances, I'd do the same thing again."

"When a woman's mixed up in it, anything's liable to happen to the best man living," commented Smith sympathetically. "Mebbe you'll tell us all about it, some day, when it don't hurt so bad. But that don't cut any ice with us—ain't that right, doc? It takes more'n being in jail to make a man a bad citizen; and I guess there's more'n one bad citizen who oughta be in the pen.

"Now," he went on, "this stuff about Hammersley is no more'n the doc and I suspected. We thought, when we heard what you said to Dicksee about Dynevor dying first, that he wouldn't let that bunch of money get by without making a strong try for it. We'd a pretty good idea you was up against the steam roller and that it was gettin' all ready to roll. And, sizing you up, we reckoned that this trip the old bus was gonna stack up against something pretty solid. Ain't that right, doc?"

"But why should a man in Mr. Hammersley's position attempt such measures?" said Morney. "Understand that I've nothing against Mr. Rutherford. Under the circumstances he had to discharge me——"

"Why?" interposed Potts. "Why should he be satisfied with a mere admission?"

"I guess you'd a pretty good idea the whole thing was cut and dried," added Smith shrewdly as Morney was silent. "You can bet Rutherford knew all about it. Do you think, if they hadn't known you were disinherited, that your old man and his money wasn't back of you, that they'd have taken this line? I guess not! Hammersley told you one truth, anyway—that he don't go into things blindfold. There's a steam roller in every town, and in a small burg it comes down to a case of one or two families; Hammersley, Rutherford, and Dynevor ran the show ever since I come here. You can take with slow music and pink lights what that lawyer said about the estate, for I'll bet it's worth half a million if it's worth a cent."

"Do you think there would have been any reason for Mr. Dynevor to commit suicide?" said Morney. "There's something I haven't told you, something that's been on my mind for days. I don't know if I did right in keeping silent nor if I'm making it better or worse by speaking now. And please believe that, no matter what has happened, I'm not trying to make trouble for anybody."

He then related briefly everything in connection with his discovery of the residue in the tumbler and, from the profound silence with which the story was received, he could judge of its importance.

"My whiskers!" exclaimed Smith. And he heaved himself up and began to walk the floor. "Say, what in thunder made you do that fool thing—remove the stuff without telling anybody? Why didn't you put Dicksee wise?"

"I don't know," replied Morney. "I acted

on impulse, the way I've done lots of things in my life. Dicksee was so rattled that I thought he might ridicule the whole thing, not give it the attention it deserved, and maybe throw the stuff out. I didn't expect to get knocked on the head and to have the stuff stolen, or that Mr. Dynevor would be buried before I'd a chance to know definitely the sort of poison it was."

"And supposing it had been analyzed that same night and found to be poison, how could you prove that it come from that glass on Dynevor's desk?" demanded Smith, eying him sharply.

"I'm telling you that it did."

"Yes, but how would it stand as evidence in a court of law? We're taking your word for it, but you've no proof. Don't you see that by removing the stuff, without anybody knowing, you were doing the very best thing to help the murderer—if it did happen to be murder? Why, they could charge you with being an accessory after the fact."

"Yes, it was a mistake that might have had serious consequences," said Potts. "But you've nothing to worry about, for Mr. Dynevor died from natural causes. There's absolutely no question of that. I believe I told you I saw the remains and that there's no mistaking a case of apoplexy. If there really was poison in that glass Mr. Dynevor didn't take any; you may be quite sure about that. No, you've nothing to worry about, and I don't think there's anything to be gained by making this matter public; it would only make trouble for you—would be sure to be exploited by your enemies. Smith, of course, will forget he's a representative of the law——"

"Now please wait a minute," interrupted Morney, "for we haven't got to the bottom of this yet. I don't pretend to be a toxicologist, doctor, but I've studied more than chemistry. I know that Mr. Dynevor showed all the characteristic signs of apoplexy—but what about nicotine?"

"Nicotine?" exclaimed Potts incredulously. "That's most uncommon."

"Yes, I believe it's only in the Swedish pharmacopœia."

"Say, do you mean tobacco juice?" exclaimed Smith.

Potts made an impatient gesture. "Tobacco poisoning is very common, but poisoning by pure nicotine extremely rare. It's a clear, colorless oil, a highly poisonous alkaloid, and there isn't more than four per cent of it in most commercial tobacco. It has only been used medicinally on rare occasions—in tetanus and as an antidote to strychnine poisoning. It affects the nervous system and constricts the blood vessels."

"Yes," said Morney, "and it's easily administered, being miscible not only in water but ether, alcohol, and the fixed oils. And though it's colorless, it turns brown on exposure to air and light. It wouldn't be detected in, say, a glass of whisky and soda. Again, it kills as quickly as prussic acid and leaves about the same signs as apoplexy."

"How?" queried Smith, busy with soiled notebook and pencil. "You mean a guy poisoned with the stuff would look about the same as if he died of apoplexy?"

"So much so, I believe," said Morney, "that anybody with a biased mind, and who had no reason to think that apoplexy wasn't the cause of death, wouldn't doubt it. Now, doctor, supposing that was the case here? Consider that Dicksee was flustered——"

"But you're overlooking something," said Potts, "something that you, as a chemist, aren't expected to know. Nicotine contracts the walls of the stomach and thus causes nausea and vomiting; also convulsions usually occur. There was none of this, according to all evidence, in Dynevor's case."

"But those symptoms don't always occur," replied Morney. "Take the case related by Taylor where a man took an unknown quantity and died quickly and quietly without convulsions. It all depends on the strength of the dose. The suggested fatal dose for an adult is six milligrams, but supposing you got as much as Fouguies in the historic Bocarmé case? You wouldn't have time to throw a fit."

"You're shooting over my head," said Potts. "You evidently know far more about the stuff than I; I've only a limited academic knowledge and I've never seen a case of pure nicotine poisoning. This suggestion of yours is startling, to say the least."

"But if the stuff is so rare—if it ain't the sort of thing you can buy in a drug store—how would a guy get it?" demanded Smith.

"Wasn't Dynevor a chemist?" said Morney. "It can be made easily enough. You soak tobacco leaves in water for twenty-four hours, heat it to a hundred degrees by steam, mix the extract with lime and distill it. Then it's neutralized by oxalic acid and evaporated. There's the Kissling process and others."

"And they say Dynevor had a regular laboratory at the house," remarked Potts slowly. "But all this is only supposition, and you don't even know that it was nicotine."

"Well, that's easily settled," put in Smith. "I guess the State analyst won't be long finding out."

"But are we justified in taking that step?" said Potts. "To my mind it's not a question to be decided offhand; there are many things to consider and——"

"Yes, that's why I didn't know what to do," interrupted Morney. "It's bound to make a sensation and, even at the best, there'll be a lot of nasty talk. I'm not thinking, nor do I care a rap, how it concerns me. But there's Miss Rutherford, for instance; she'll be brought into it, for she was the last person who saw Mr. Dynevor alive."

"You're getting the cart before the horse," said Smith. "There's no use supposing anything until we know first-off if Dynevor was croaked. And it ain't our concern how it's going to affect anybody; duty is duty."

"That's all very well," remarked Potts, "but I quite understand why Mr. Morney found it such a problem, and that problem must be ours, too. It isn't always so easy to decide what one's real duty is; often enough we mix up inclination with a sense of duty and do something because we want to do it, not because it's the right thing. Supposing the Hammersleys weren't concerned in this?" And he looked hard at the detective.

"Well, who's sayin' they are?" challenged the other.

"Oh, don't be so innocent," said Potts. "You know what I mean. It's all right in one sense that we shouldn't consider how the thing is going to effect anybody, but all wrong if we use it——"

"Now stop right there," exclaimed Smith. "I see what you're driving at. Why, you're as good as accusing me——"

"I'm not. You know, for the matter of that, that I haven't such a liking for the Hammersleys either. But that very fact should make us doubly cautious, and we must be governed only by one consideration—do the facts that we possess justify us in taking such a step? What are the probabilities of the whole case? In the first place does——"

"But that ain't for us to decide," argued Smith. "We've got nothing to do with that. I ain't talking now as a representative of the law; I'm off duty, this is a private talk, and I can treat all that Mr. Morney's told us as confidential. But I say it's his duty and ours to lay the matter before the proper authorities and let them decide whether it's a case for exhumation or not; that's their business, not ours. I say it oughta be done, and that there's no two ways about it."

"And I agree with you," said Morney. "I'm pretty certain that that stuff was nicotine, though the fact of it being mixed with whisky made it hard to identify. But, of course, that doesn't mean necessarily that Mr. Dynevor took any of it; the stuff's used as an insecticide, you know. Anyway, I'm sure that Mr. Smith is right; now that I've talked the whole thing over I see that I wouldn't be easy in my mind if we decided otherwise. I couldn't accept the responsibility."

"If that's the way you feel," said Potts, "then there's no need of further discussion. Aside from all else, I couldn't help taking into consideration the probable effect of this disclosure on you and your circumstances. As a friend it appeared to me—and I'm not yet convinced to the contrary—that the whole thing simply wasn't worth the trouble it may cause you."

CHAPTER XI.

Meanwhile at Mount Vernon—there were those who smiled ironically at the name given the Rutherford home—Amos Hammersley had brought all his self-restraint and diplomacy to bear on the unpalatable and unpleasant situation created by his host's daughter. Self-restraint and diplomacy were by no means the strongest weapons in the Hammersley armory nor by their use did he try to convert Jill to his way of thinking or bend her to his will; he saw clearly that such an attempt would be hopeless and that further argument on his part would only serve to arouse her suspicions. His efforts at diplomacy were confined to smoothing over the whole matter, giving it the appearance of a mere trivial incident, and imposing a check on his own violent temper. He wished to see Rutherford alone, but did not find an opportunity until after supper, when some of the younger set dropped in.

"And now, Sam," he said, when he saw Jill engaged with her guests, "I guess the old folks may adjourn and your daughter can

spare her father's company. Better go to the museum, I guess."

Rutherford led the way with reluctant step.

Once in the room where, owing to its isolation, all their private talks were held, Hammersley gave vent to his pent-up feelings. "Well, this is a nice situation!" he exclaimed. "I've got a nice deal from the family, and I want to know the meaning of it. First of all, how did your daughter happen to be here to-day? There's some funny business going on." And his little eyes measured the other angrily and suspiciously.

Rutherford shrugged. "I didn't know myself until the last minute that she wasn't going to Cranford. I phoned you not to come but you'd left."

"And so everything was to be altered because of her, eh? Why didn't you make her go? She's come home from that school with some nice ideas and the sooner she loses 'em the better. Why, if she was a grown woman——"

"And she is, Amos. You can't treat her as a child any longer. She went away a child and has come back a woman. If I'd insisted on her going to Cranford she'd have suspected something—and I'm not sure she doesn't."

"Look here, has that pup Morney been talking to her? Have they met, except here to-day, since the night of the accident?"

"Well, they met to-day on his way here."

"I knew it!" exclaimed Hammersley, banging a fist on a chair. "And how long were they together? You don't know! How often have they met before? You don't know! All this has been going on under your nose—that's the sort of help I get from the family; that's how my interests are looked after! Why, the whole thing's as plain as soup; that whelp's been getting to windward of us from the first. He saw that if Jill's evidence was against us, too, we wouldn't have a leg left to fight on. Maybe that big bowl of tripe, Smith, put him up to it. You said he saw him at the hospital?"

Intrigued by this new idea Hammersley proceeded to embellish it. "Yes, and there's that fellow Potts, too, one of these socialistic failures that's always spouting about the crimes of capital; I'll bet you anything you like that Smith and he are behind Morney in this—not to mention others. And he's worked the romantic saved-your-life slush with your girl and got her to believe anything he says. The Lord knows what he's told her. She may be in love with the fellow in her silly, fluff-headed fashion! A rascal like him, with his record with women——"

"That's rot," exclaimed Rutherford. "Whatever Morney may have told her, I'm convinced that her belief as to when the accident happened is fixed and unalterable."

"Is that so? Well, you're going to unfix it or I'll know the reason why!"

"I'll do nothing of the kind." Rutherford, who had evidently been keying himself up to meet a scene which he knew to be inevitable, squared his narrow shoulders. "I've done my best—or worst—and more I won't do. So long as there was some doubt in her mind I could manage to compromise with my conscience——"

"Your what?" snorted Hammersley.

"I tried persuasion, Amos, and thought I had succeeded. I won't attempt coercion. Be reasonable, Amos, and don't try to do the impossible! It's a wise man who knows when he's beaten."

Hammersley glared at him. "So you refuse, eh? You meant what you told her? I'm to lose out for want of a leg to fight on, and all because you're afraid of a young flapper that ought to be laid over your knee and well leathered. All right, Sam. I suppose you've properly weighed the consequences? I can be a hard man when put to it, and if we break, we *break!* Understand?"

"Break then!" And Rutherford, as though it were a gage of battle, excitedly plucked the wig from his head and flung it on the floor. "There's a line I won't cross for you or any man! I won't have my girl made a perjurer! I won't have her dirtied by his business. She'll go into court and tell God's truth as she believes it!"

Hammersley was silent, as if struck dumb by the white fury of the other's face, the intensity of his passion, the fixity of purpose written in his glittering eyes. The insignificant and even grotesque-looking little figure had suddenly risen to formidable heights; one might even imagine him, in the grip of this emotional crisis, plucking a weapon from among the many that were so handy and flinging himself on Hammersley. To the latter this very thought might have occurred, for he glowered and then growled, "All right; quit hollerin', can't you? Keep your vest down! There ain't any need to go crazy."

Rutherford gulped and picked up the

wig; there was sweat on his gaunt cheek and his hand trembled. "I mean it," he said in a cracked voice. "You can do as you like. I'd suffer anything—*anything*—before making my girl go crooked."

"Hello!" suddenly chirped a voice from the direction of the adjoining room. "Anybody at home? You there, Rutherford?"

The two men glanced at each other; then Rutherford composed his features and stepped to the study door while Hammersley, becoming the student and lover of the Revolutionary period, assumed the semicomatose attitude before a relic of Molly Pitcher.

"Oh, hello, Rutherford," greeted Dicksee, entering the study as the other switched on the electrics. "I've been making myself pretty much at home, you see; couldn't find any one, so walked right up. I met Miss Jill and some friends on their way to the country club. Oh, hello!" as Hammersley sauntered into the room. "Dear me, don't you two ever get tired of poring over that stuff in there? Much better to be out an evening like this than shut up in a close room. Take warning by poor Dynevor—and you resemble him very much in build, Hammersley. Never could get him to take sufficient exercise."

Apparently he had come on no special business and, accepting a cigar from Rutherford, he proceeded to make himself at home. He appeared quite a different person from the nervous and flustered individual of the night of the accident; now he looked hardly over forty-five; by profound attention to his person, coupled with a sprightly manner, he managed to grapple successfully with the problem of lost youth. A bachelor, many a spinster heart still treasured the hope of leading him eventually to what Smith would have called the "halter."

He talked steadily for well over an hour, for the most part inconsequential chatter that was part of his stock in trade; he brought it into the sick room, with his impressive collection of prettily colored homeopathic pills, and perhaps one was as efficacious as the other. Hammersley, lacking the obligations imposed on a host, made little pretense of concealing his boredom. It was now after nine o'clock, and he would have gone home had he not expected the return of Caspar with the car; moreover he desired a final word with Rutherford.

"By the way, Hammersley," said Dicksee at length, "was there any truth in what I told you that fellow Morney said? I mean his statement that Mrs. Dynevor died last."

"How do I know?" said Hammersley gruffly. "Did you expect me to go ask him? It's nothing to me what he said."

"But I—er—understood, if it should be true, it would mean a great difference to you. Of course I wasn't familiar with poor Dynevor's private affairs——"

"Why, was there anything his wife didn't know?"

"What a funny question, Hammersley. Won't you explain it?"

Hammersley smiled sardonically and shrugged. "Funny things that need explaining ain't funny," he said slowly.

At this moment the voice of Jill Rutherford was heard below, and presently Caspar and she entered the room. "Dad, what do you think has happened?" she exclaimed, her eyes dark with excitement. "They say Mr. Dynevor's body is to be removed and —and sent to an analyst or somebody!"

"What!" cried Rutherford. "Exhumed? Why—why what do you mean?"

"Fiddlesticks!" said Doctor Dicksee.

"Skybosh!" said Amos Hammersley. "Where did you hear it?" turning to the silent Caspar.

"At the club; that's why we came straight home. Of course I don't believe it, though I got it pretty straight. It's that fellow Morney again; he and Smith have been to old Quiller and the sheriff—they say he was over at the hospital first——"

"But what about?" cried his father. "Explain it, can't you?"

"Yes, if you'll give me a chance," snapped the son. "I can only tell you what I heard —or some one else heard. They say it was poison, not apoplexy, and that this fellow Morney knows all about it. I don't know how, but they say he does. And they say there'll be an order for exhumation."

"Moonshine!" exclaimed Dicksee. "They've been pulling your leg. Poison? Ha, ha! Dear me, but that's good! If you'd any medical knowledge you'd see how utterly preposterous it was. It reminds me of a story——"

But Hammersley, with a muttered exclamation, had picked up the desk telephone and called the coroner's private residence. "Hello, Doctor Quiller?" he bawled. "Amos Hammersley speaking. I've just heard a queer yarn about my cousin's death. *What!* Why wasn't I informed? No. I wasn't

home, but I guess you could have found me. It's infernal nonsense! I don't care what that fellow says; he's liable to say anything——"

He slammed down the receiver and the four men stared at one another, the girl looking at each in turn.

CHAPTER XII.

The coroner and Hammersley were old opponents, and the latter had attempted more than once to oust Quiller from the office he had held for years; not that it was a bone financially worth fighting over but, being the only public position that Quiller filled, its deprivation would have symbolized victory over the old sods, as Hammersley termed the faction that opposed him, and the passing of a formidable antagonist.

Hammersley and Dynevor, unlike Rutherford, were not natives of the town, and little was known concerning them prior to their advent in Pinelake. Rutherford had been absent half a dozen years on the peddling campaign with the salve that laid the foundation of his fortune, and on his return he brought with him, not only a healthy bank account, but a three-year-old child, Jill, and James Dynevor. It seemed that he had married during the interim. His wife had died, and Dynevor was a friend, a chemist with some capital, with whom he meant to enlarge the business. Then Dynevor married Rutherford's only sister and, as Potts had related, the two men became partners and opened a factory. All this had happened some fifteen years before and Potts, more of a newcomer to the town than even Smith, had told only what he learned from older residents.

Hammersley came to Pinelake not long after the arrival of his cousin and soon made his presence felt. Ostensibly his business was real estate and insurance, but he dabbled in everything where lurked the promise of a penny profit; and he was one of those who knew how to make politics pay. Neither Rutherford nor Dynevor showed much interest in the political game, but it was enough that Hammersley did. He was backed by the firm's growing influence, and he used it to further his own. Thus as the patent-medicine factory prospered the steam roller came into existence with Hammersley, the engineer, at the throttle. He eventually became mayor and under his régime the red light, the saloon and gambling den prospered, while that district across the railroad, known as West Pinelake, achieved a more lurid reputation. Then, with his star in the zenith and no longer merely a king but, like Warwick, a king maker, there came the war, prohibition, and other grossly unpleasant facts and, among other things, Hammersley lost his figurehead, the sheriff. In the dawn of the new era following the war his predatory star was on the wane.

The adjourned inquest on Mrs. Dynevor was held on Monday in the Criminal Court Building, a grandiloquent title for a shabby, protean pile that embraced the local "cooler," the sheriff's and town clerk's offices, police headquarters, and magistrate's court. The place was crowded as, aside from all else, the fact that James Dynevor's remains were to be exhumed and the contents of the stomach sent to the State analyst, had produced a tremendous sensation. Dicksee still affected to treat the whole affair as a huge joke, but it was known that there had been a heated interview between Hammersley and Quiller. Hammersley called it a hole-and-corner business, declared there was no reason for an order for exhumation, and insinuated that the coroner and sheriff were lending their offices to the interests of political spite.

"That fellow Morney's trying to raise a stink because I had him fired," he declared. "He's a jailbird, and you believe this piffle because it suits you. You and that fellow Scott, the sheriff——"

"Now stop right there," said Quiller, who had the general appearance of a venerable vulture. "The motive of that young man, Morney, may be what you like, but I've only the one—to carry out a duty imposed by my office. His character also may be what you like, but his evidence demands an order for exhumation. He can't raise what you call a stink where none exists."

"You know what I mean," rasped Hammersley. "Nobody wants a lot of newspaper rot; my cousin has a right to rest peaceably in his grave—I guess they told enough lies about him when he was alive. You can bet I'd be the last one to make a kick if there was reasonable grounds for thinking he didn't die a natural death; but there ain't."

"That's where I differ," said Quiller. "Nor am I alone in my opinion. I've no choice but to do my duty."

"Slimy old hypocrite," growled Hammersley as he flung out.

His reflections were not pleasant; after so many years of success everything was suddenly going wrong; and he could attribute much of it to that cursed meddler Morney. Thanks to him, Jill Rutherford was up in arms, and her father, too. This meant that, if he was ever to touch a penny of the Dynevor fortune, it would be only after a legal battle in the civil courts. For the present he was beaten and had lost the first trick. Rutherford, the mulehead, would not attempt to coerce the girl and he, Hammersley, was stumped. To break with Rutherford, as he threatened, required careful consideration and could be done only as a last resort; for he himself would suffer, even though in less degree, and he could not afford an open rupture at this critical stage in his fortunes.

"There's nothing to do," said Caspar, with whom he sat up that Sunday night discussing the problem, "but to let things stand. Let Jill and that crook say what they like tomorrow, for we can't stop them; but when it comes to the civil court we'll show what his evidence is worth. By that time you'll have decided what to do about Rutherford, and it'll be queer if Jill doesn't decide to change her mind again. Her evidence doesn't really matter, for she can only give it as a mere opinion when the accident occurred, although, of course, it would have been a tremendous help if, as we'd every reason to think, she was ready to swear that it happened before seven. We won't say a word but wait until the real fight comes."

Thus, to the ordinary observer, the inquest must have appeared a very tame affair, and those who had come to hear opposing evidence given by the two principal witnesses were disappointed.

It was curious to note the effect on Hammersley when Jill Rutherford gave it as her belief that the accident happened after seven; he was raging inwardly, yet he glanced round the court with a triumphant sneer that merged with a look of vindicated virtue. It seemed to say: "You thought she'd swear it was before seven, didn't you? You thought I'd been getting at her. But you see I ain't that kind of a man, no matter what liars have said about me. No, sir, I wouldn't try to influence her for all the money in the world." And so many queer twists and kinks has the poor human mind, and such its capacity for self-deception, that for the moment Hammersley quite believed this and plumed himself accordingly.

"After seven?" said Quiller, with slightly raised brows. "May I ask how you arrived at that conclusion? Had you any means of noting the exact time?"

"No, for I never thought of looking at the clock on the dashboard. But I know it was after seven because, just as we reached the turnpike, I heard the town clock striking. I had forgotten this, but last night it all came back to me." And her eyes turned instinctively to where her father sat. "I'm quite, quite sure of that," she concluded earnestly.

Hammersley sat back and glared covertly at her; he had not counted on anything like this. A mere matter of opinion, based on nothing tangible, was one thing, but this downright statement quite another. How could she controvert it later? He had been betrayed again.

Morney, following next, gave his account clearly and concisely, explaining how he had come to time the car and how he had happened to glance at his wrist watch as he bent over Mrs. Dynevor. "I heard the town clock strike seven, and the car wasn't then in sight. My watch is an army one, and it couldn't be persuaded to go wrong." And a titter went up from those who had heard something of the attempted bribery.

The rest was without interest and the verdict a foregone conclusion; all this was but the curtain raiser of what many hoped would be a far more absorbing drama, and these the actors who would appear in it. It would take the better part of a week for the State analyst to furnish his report, and bets were freely made as to what that report would be.

Among those present at the inquest was a certain Mr. Baldwin, a little old hairless person with watery eyes, the legal bulwark of the California orphan asylum. Both were obscure institutions and had been overwhelmed by the prospective Dynevor windfall, and Mr. Baldwin had figuratively fallen upon Morney's neck and blessed him. He insisted on explaining about Mrs. Dynevor's connection with the orphan asylum, while Morney hid a yawn and tried hard to look interested. There was something pathetic in Mr. Baldwin's excitement; all his life he had haggled over pennies in obscure legal corners and now, behold, he was the defender of a big fortune, with the prospect of appearing in the highest courts. To him it was a tremendous affair, something almost international in its scope and appeal.

"The tree of gratitude, sir, flourishes best in the poorest soil and is watered by the tears of adversity," declared the hairless one as he walked the Flannery reception room while Hamlet, promoted from the back yard, eyed him with somber suspicion. For Mr. Baldwin, as if rehearsing his appearance in the supreme court, was indulging in rhetorical gestures, working his arm up and down as if manning a pump, so that one might almost imagine him supplying the aforesaid liquid. "Mrs. Dynevor was a poor derelict on the Barbary Coast when gathered in by the Arms of the Good Shepherd—not a metaphor, sir, but the official title of the eleemosynary institution I represent. Yes, a poor little waif in one of the worst districts of San Francisco.

"She was taken into the Arms of the Good Shepherd, educated and equipped for the battle of life. When she went forth to earn her living they lost touch with her—I believe she was in England for a time—but she had not forgotten them, it seems. It was the only home she had ever known, her teachers the only parents she had ever known, and this is her return. As she had no relatives she made a will, shortly after her marriage, bequeathing to my clients everything, both real and personal, of which she might die possessed. They may say, perhaps, that at the time she could have had no knowledge of the magnitude of her generosity, yet she must have contemplated the possibility of her husband predeceasing her; indeed, it was inevitable, he being so much her senior.

"Mr. Hammersley," he concluded, "hasn't a leg to stand on; we have him beaten, and he knows it. If he persists in fighting the case I can depend on you!" And Mr. Baldwin, whose experience of the human family had been unhappy, touched upon the matter of what Gabriel Poynter would have no doubt termed an honorarium. Of course Morney would be entitled to expenses and if circumstances were such that he wished to anticipate——

"I've really no personal interest in this case, Mr. Baldwin," said Morney, "nor have I any spite against Mr. Hammersley, no matter what you may have heard. I hate the whole business, but I've been roped into it by old man Fate, and I intend to see it through. I'm very much obliged but, of course, I couldn't consider your suggestion, and I'll pay my own expenses."

Morney found that he had made both friends and enemies; his seeming friends were those who, for various reasons, were opposed to Hammersley, and, conversely, his enemies were the adherents of the latter. Though Hammersley's power was on the wane, it was by no means negligible; it might be said that he had lost the county but retained a good foothold in the city. And he was trying hard to come back into full power. Potts spoke of this in a subsequent conversation.

"If the prohibition law should be repealed it would mean Hammersley back as undisputed boss," he said. "His enemies—the Quiller-Scott crowd—aim to put him in the discard before there's a chance of that happening. But Hammersley still has certain strong backing and, with the exception of Smith, has the police department virtually in his pocket. Smith has his own reasons for hating Hammersley. You see it's all a sort of cutthroat game and you're in the middle of it. Hammersley's enemies are naturally glad of any weapon that may be used to knock him finally through the ropes; and they don't care a whoop what happens to that weapon so long as it does the job."

"Well, I can't help that," said Morney. "I had to testify at that inquest, and I'll have to testify at the next—if there be one."

"I don't want to see you made a cat's-paw of," said Potts anxiously. "I didn't want you to get into all this mess. I'm against Hammersley, or what he stands for, but his methods may be no worse than those of some of these so-called reformers. I understand he means to run for the State senate. Well, if it should happen that his cousin was poisoned, and it's shown that he thought he would come into the estate, that might be rather useful political ammunition for his opponents, eh?" And Potts smiled cynically. "Let us hope you're wrong about that stuff," he added, "for it might stink up more than Hammersley. Yes, I could tell you a whole lot, but most of it might be lies; I wasn't personally acquainted with the Dynevors, you know, and you have to live in a place like this before you realize the rarity of truth. All the same, your average small town has your big city backed off the map when it comes to general human cussedness; or maybe it's merely that you get to hear more about it."

If the house physician was averse to peddling scandal there were plenty who weren't,

and Morney heard a good deal during the next few days. Curiously enough Rutherford, although bracketed with Hammersley and Dynevor, was regarded differently even by the most inveterate opponents of the steam roller. Rutherford & Co. were blamed for lending their influence to further Hammersley's schemes, but it was conceded generally that, as a firm, they had profited little; indeed, no more than was their legitimate due. Rutherford's private life was spoken of as exemplary, the treatment of his employees just and even generous, and he appeared to be well liked in the big factory. It was otherwise with Dynevor who had led apparently anything but an exemplary life; if report was to be credited he had not treated his first wife any too well and, in consequence, it was said there had been friction between Rutherford and him long before their ultimate separation.

CHAPTER XIII.

With the exception of the inquest Morney had seen nothing of Jill Rutherford since the previous Sunday at Mount Vernon and, even in the courtroom, they had not met. Indeed, he had gone out of his way to avoid her. But on the Friday following the inquest they chanced to meet. At least it had all the appearance of chance. He had been out for a ramble with Hamlet, along the lake and through the woods, and they met on the bridge that led to the Merrion Road.

"Why have you avoided me, Mr. Morney?" she demanded in her blunt fashion. "Oh, yes, you have; you wouldn't look at me in court, the other day, and then you hurried out for fear we might meet. And you would have passed now if I hadn't spoken. Am I the plague?"

"Hardly, but I'm supposed to be. Haven't you heard that?"

"I've heard many things, and no doubt you have, too; but belief is a different matter. I refuse to believe Mr. Hammersley's explanation of why you were dismissed—I can't call it my father's, for he won't discuss it, and it was Mr. Hammersley who insisted on explaining it."

"But it's quite true about the Edinburgh matter."

"Yes? Well, I suppose I must believe it, if you really insist. But I won't believe the other part, what Mr. Hammersley said about a—a woman."

"Why?" he asked gravely. "You really know very little about me, practically nothing."

"And I really don't have to." She made an impatient gesture of dismissal. "You aren't the type, that's all. Any one could tell the difference; it doesn't require knowledge or experience, merely instinct. Good is good and bad bad."

And somehow Morney could find nothing to say. For the first time, he began to regard seriously this small person. He had no great experience of women, nor had that experience been such as to tempt further investigation, but he had found it a workable rule that their intellect was in inverse ratio to their pulchritude. Going by this recipe, Jill Rutherford should have been composed of one part intellect and common sense to some ten of vanity and nonsense, sugar-coated and with a silly little giggle on top; a lollipop pleasing to the eye, and momentarily to the palate, but terribly sickening as a steady diet.

"Besides," she added as she flushed and stammered, "I do know something about you; I know that this fine Italian greyhound, as, no doubt, you would now call him," and she rubbed Hamlet's war map, "was the dog that had the fight with Buster and that you are the supposed tramp. And I also know that it all happened with reverse English. I knew it long ago, before I spoke to you about it. How? Oh, I've faint glimmerings of intelligence now and then; in fact, I may as well admit that, for a child, I'm considered almost bright."

He laughed, with sheer pleasure at the picture she made, no less than at her words. She was leaning over the low rail of the little bridge and looking up at him, head at an angle and one sparkling eye half closed—a trick of hers—so that she put him in mind of a small, beautiful and shrewd little bird. The warm westering sun, splashing through the adjacent trees, made a glory of her upturned face and bared head.

"Seeing that you know so much," he said, "I wonder if you would care to know more—I mean about the Edinburgh episode."

"I'm content not to know; you mustn't think I ask an explanation. And I think it hurts; I think you got a worse wound than any the Germans gave you."

"I believe I'm finding it wasn't so bad a one as I thought," he said slowly, as he leaned over the rail at her side. "It's

funny how we come to look at things differently. The story isn't one I've been peddling round but—well, I should like to tell you; that's an infliction we reserve for our friends—and I hope we're going to be very good friends, Miss Rutherford."

"Going to be? Why, we *are!* I need a friend, for I've been very much troubled and confused about all that's been happening. To tell you the truth, this meeting has been no accident, Mr. Morney. I saw you in the woods, knew you must return this way, and so laid an ambush. There's so much I want to know, and I can't help feeling that I'm a victim of a conspiracy of silence. They all insist on treating me as a child to whom a revised version of everything must be told, if told at all. You see, I've never known a mother or brothers or sisters, no real chums; I've always been away at boarding school and college. But perhaps you can't understand."

"Oh, indeed, I can. I've never known much of a home life, either."

"I've been horribly lonely," she said, with sudden intensity of feeling. "Dad has always given me everything but love. No, I don't mean that; I mean he never allowed me into his real life. I do so want to be a companion to him, a help. Mr. Morney, will you tell me if it's true that Mr. Hammersley tried to bribe you? Oh, please don't try to put me off. I—I must know the truth."

"Yes, it's true," he said. "But, of course, I can't prove it, and it's merely my word against his. And my word is that of one who has been in jail."

"Your word is good enough for me, Mr. Morney. I suspected all this, that it was the real reason for your dismissal. But you—you don't believe my father knew anything? You can't believe that?"

"Oh, certainly not," said Morney. "The thing was sprung on him, and he had nothing else to do. I deserved it for not telling him about my being in jail."

She eyed him steadily. "Are you only saying that or do you really believe it? Oh, I don't mean to doubt my father. But there are things I can't ignore. I can't escape the suspicion that it wasn't any news to my father, that the stage was all set after it was known I would be away in Cranford."

"But it's nothing to your father when Mrs. Dynevor died," he said reassuringly. "I mean, aside from all else, he doesn't stand to lose or gain anything like Mr. Hammersley."

"No," she said slowly, "but he might do for Mr. Hammersley's sake what he certainly wouldn't do for his own. Mr. Hammersley seems to have a great influence over him; I'm just beginning to notice that now."

"It would require a great deal of influence to make a man, against his will, a party to subornation of perjury."

"And yet consider your own case," she said gently. "It isn't always bad people who are led to do bad things—not that I think you were really guilty. It's one thing to serve a prison sentence, another to deserve it."

"But I did deserve it," he said quietly. "I was guilty. Are you very much shocked?"

She shook her head. "I know the circumstances must have been exceptional. And so we come to your story; please tell it to me."

"Know ye then," he said, his eyes on the placid surface of the lake, and a grimness about his mouth that belied the flippant words, "that all this is old stuff, embracing as it does the parable of the tares, the prodigal son, and the wise virgin; for I think, on the whole, she was considerably more wise than foolish."

"What was her name and what did she look like?" said Jill Rutherford instantly.

"Eh?" Morney made a vague gesture. "Her name was Rose and she looked like one—an English rose. But I'm beginning this story at the wrong end; to properly understand it you should hear first about the prodigal and the tares."

"I don't think you could have been very much of a prodigal or that you went on many tears."

"No," said Morney reflectively, "I wasn't much of a prodigal; that's the funny part of it. I've often thought about it and come to the conclusion that I happened to be born into the wrong family. Perhaps if my mother had lived things would have been different, but she died when I was a little shaver, and somehow my father and I never made a match of it. Understand that I'm not criticizing him; he's been a good father according to his lights, and I've been a good son according to mine. But for all our lights the final result has been a sort of total eclipse.

"We look at things differently and always did—like the Sunday when, on our way to

church, I went to help fix a burst gas main. To me that seemed the obvious and necessary thing to do; but my father held that it was none of my business if the whole town blew up and that I'd disgraced the family again, working in my shirt sleeves of a Sunday morning on Fifth Avenue. And so, I dare say, I had. That's the way it's always been; we've a different viewpoint. I didn't care for the society game and could never acquire a proper respect for money.

"I hated the house on Madison Avenue, and my happiest times, as a child, were with my mother's people out in Montana. Many a year, while at prep school and college, when vacation came round, I went off and got a job somewhere rather than return to the dreary round at home and the inevitable misunderstandings. And so, although I never really did anything very terrible, I was regarded as wild.

"After graduating and getting my degree, I entered the business; then the war came and I enlisted. My father said I should have waited for the draft, that it was my old trick of ram-stamming ahead and minding everybody's business but my own. But he wasn't really mad—there's no mistaking the difference—and we'd been getting on rather well, sort of understanding each other better. The only thing that promised any serious trouble was the question of my getting married; he had picked out the victim and there was only one thing wrong with the selection—I didn't love her and, for that matter, I'm quite sure she never cared a straw for me.

"But my father seemed to have it all fixed in his mind, and I pretended not to see it; we were getting on so well that I didn't want another break and, whenever he led up to the subject, I side-stepped. But I honestly didn't think he was so keen on my marrying this particular person as my marrying somebody, in what he would call 'our set,' and settling down.

"Well, now I come to the hard part, and I don't know quite how to tell it; I'll cut it as short as possible and, if it's too boring, just sing out.

"I met Rose in London, after I'd been invalided out, and it was the old story of love at first sight. We became engaged in record time, and I wrote the glad news to my father, who was down in South America on a business trip, where he was to be gone several months. I thought everything would be all right and that he couldn't help loving Rose once he had met her and——" Morney paused and swung round as an automobile, whose approach they had failed to heed, drew into the curb and stopped. It was the Rutherford's car and Amos Hammersley was the other occupant of the tonneau.

"Jill!" called her father peremptorily.

"Botheration!" she exclaimed under her breath. She hesitated, her eyes mutinous. "I suppose I must go. I did so want to hear the rest."

"It will keep," he said.

"You won't forget? And, remember, we are friends."

They shook hands, and reluctantly she entered the car as a motor cycle came spluttering up from the direction of the town. The rider was Caspar Hammersley. As he swung off, Hamlet, recognizing an enemy, arose and swore eloquently.

"I've just heard that the report's come in," said Caspar, his words, and a scowl, meant for Morney. "It's what we knew—all a malicious lie. They couldn't find a trace of poison. Cousin Jim died of apoplexy."

There was a moment's silence and then Amos Hammersley leaned over the side of the car and stared at Morney; the little black eyes were gleaming like highly polished shoe buttons, his mulberry face alight with triumph, his whole bearing that of one who has received almost unbelievably good news.

"You hear that?" he bawled, aiming the inevitable finger.

Morney nodded. "I'm very glad."

"Oh, you are, eh? You're glad like the dip that frisked an empty poke, that's how glad you are! You've done your worst and failed and now, by Joshua! I'm gonna make this town too hot to hold you. If you don't beat it, you'll go out on a rail! You hear me?" And, as the car moved off, accompanied by the grinning Caspar, Hammersley stared over the back of the tonneau as though, by the magic of eyes and menacing finger, he could remove the degrading presence of Morney from the town.

Morney walked slowly homeward, his thoughts busy with the State analyst's report; if the whole thing had proved a mare's-nest there was now no reason why he should remain longer in Pinelake. Of course, he was still at Mr. Baldwin's service, but that

didn't necessitate his remaining in the town; there was no future for him here, and it was high time he gave his attention to the matter of finding another situation.

Busy with his thoughts, he rounded the post office and collided with the original John Smith. "Howdy," gasped that gentleman who was evidently in a hurry. "Have you heard about Dynevor?"

Morney nodded. "So it seems I was all wrong about the stuff."

Smith stared. "Say, who's been kiddin' you? They found enough to kill a dozen!"

Thus, after all, the town had its great sensation and a host of worthy people were not disappointed; for it was indubitably true that James Dynevor had not died from apoplexy; the State analyst having succeeded in separating no less than four grams of pure nicotine from the stomach.

Caspar Hammersley had had no intention of "kidding" anybody, but somebody had succeeded in kidding him; apart from the inevitable village humorist there was more than one would have found that pastime a pure pleasure. He had proved an easy victim; we believe what we wish to believe. On reaching the house, however, his father had sought to verify it and thus learned that the true report had only then come in. He spent the next few minutes calling his son names and in damning Morney anew; then he went over to Mount Vernon where he found Dicksee. The latter had just heard the news and, always anxious to be first in the field, had dropped in to see if Rutherford knew. The sight of him, dapper and garrulous, put the finishing touch on Hammersley's temper.

"Why the Harry couldn't you tell the difference between apoplexy and a dose of poison?" he exclaimed. "Oh, piffle!" as Dicksee started to explain how the mistake was made the more inevitable by Morney's action. "Why didn't *you* find the stuff in that tumbler? Why was that crook given the chance to find it? But that's got nothing to do with it, either; from what I heard, the stuff was lost and nobody knows what it was. Oh, Potts! I ain't surprised at *him* making a mistake; he ain't supposed to be one of the best doctors in the county—and he ain't paid for being it, either. My cousin wasn't under his care; he's got nothing to do with it. A man that's paid as much as you ain't supposed to make mistakes."

"If you've made as few mistakes in your life as I, I congratulate you," said Dicksee angrily. "And if you'd been as much concerned about your cousin when he was alive as——"

"What d'you mean?"

Dicksee shrugged. "I refuse to discuss the matter in your present temper which, I may add, I can hardly understand. The inquest should prove informative, but nothing that's brought to light can hurt *my* reputation."

"I wouldn't be too sure of that," said Hammersley darkly.

TO BE CONTINUED.

UNTRUSTWORTHY NEIGHBORS

AN old colored man who was working some cotton land "on shares" for Representative Thomas U. Sisson of Mississippi appeared at the "big house" one morning with the pitiful story that his old mule, the only valuable possession to his name, had strayed from home and gotten lost or had been stolen.

"I tell you what you do, Ben," advised Mr. Sisson; "advertise for him."

"Affertise?" queried the old man.

"Certainly. That's the way people do when they lose things and can't find them. They put a piece in the papers describing the lost property. I believe that will bring your mule back to you."

"Now, Gawd!" exclaimed the old man with a contempt he could not conceal. "Dat won't wuk nevuh, 'case, smart as dat ole mule is, he ain' smart enough to read de newspapuh!"

DON'T STOP PLAYING

AT one of the football games at West Point this fall, the cadets of the United States Military Academy gave the spectators a pleasant surprise. When the corps of fifteen hundred future army officers swung past the stands, they wore, instead of cadet gray, the varigated costumes of sport. Mounted polo players led this column of upstanding youngsters, and they were followed by the devotees of football, soccer, tennis, basket ball, and lacrosse. Every cadet was there, for every cadet must spend a part of his time in play. And as the keynote of the four-year course at the academy isn't play—it is work; hard drill and grinding study—the fact that the academy authorities have approved of universal athletics is excellent proof that time spent in the playing of games is a good investment for health and efficiency.

If these husky youngsters, picked men all, whose daily life gives them much more exercise than falls to the lot of the average man, need this additional physical activity and mental relaxation, how much more is it needed by the professional, business, and working man! Too many of us, by the time we have reached thirty, have stopped playing. We are content to sit in the stand and watch "Babe" Ruth slam one over the right-field fence, or worse, to get our thrills secondhand from next morning's paper. And then, one day, we find that we are honoring in the reverse the old order of "chest out and stomach in!"

It is unfortunate that real proficiency in most outdoor games must be bought at the cost of more daylight hours than most of us can spare for play. But a high degree of skill isn't necessary for the enjoyment of games. The man who can give only Saturday afternoons to tennis can't expect to play his strokes like Tilden, but he can get a lot of fun and an increased store of vigor out of the game. Perhaps Harry Vardon would smile at the "form" of some of our week-end golfers, but the duffer who uses a hundred and twenty strokes to get around the course gets as much fun—and a deal more exercise—than the expert who "shoots" it in eighty. And there are scores of other outdoor sports that you can enjoy without bothering your head about "form." It doesn't take a trained and conditioned athlete to paddle a canoe or go a-fishing.

Perhaps you will object that all these sports require an outlay of time or of money that you are not willing to make. Well, then—walk. All the equipment you need is a pair of shoes that don't pinch your toes, and you can make your outing as mild or as strenuous as you please. Any time, any place, the way always is open before you, whether it's for a ten-block stroll down Main Street at lunch time, or for a holiday hike of thirty miles, "over the hills and far away."

THE AMERICAN POLICE JOB

JUDGING from a report just made public by the Bureau of Social Hygiene, what a happy hunting ground for Sherlock Holmes this country should make! The report's statistics show that Chicago and New York City, for instance, are overrun with criminals to an extent which not even the police department of such a mighty European center as London would apparently be able to cope with at all.

There is some consolation in the thought that this state of affairs is deemed partly attributable to the unassimilated or poorly assimilated foreign races in our midst. There are drawbacks to being the "melting pot" of the world. At the same time, candor demands the admission that it is held by expert authority that, even leaving out of consideration our alien population, our crime rate would still greatly exceed that of all western Europe. As a people, we would seem, in general too much to condone violence and to lack a sufficient instinct for order and a sense of the dignity of that obedience to restraint necessary for the common good.

Figures over several years, partially illustrative of our unenviable facility in wrongdoing, are startling. In 1916, Chicago, with its population of 2,500,000, had twenty more murders than the whole of England and Wales put together, with their 38,000,000 people. In 1917, Chicago's murder record exceeded that England and Wales total by ten; in 1918, by fourteen. A pithier way of bringing the difference home lies in a comparison between Chicago and London alone. London, in 1916, had nine premeditated murders, while Chicago, one-third London's size, recorded one hundred and five. Comparison between New York City and London only confirms the story. The former city, during each of the years 1916, 1917, and 1918, registered six times more homicides than London. Nor was this discrepancy due to special war conditions in London. New York City's homicide record in any one of the years from 1914 to 1918 inclusive shows more homicides than occurred in London during any three-year period previous to the outbreak of war in 1914.

The tale is the same in the field of burglaries. In 1917 New York City had four times more burglaries than London; in 1918.two and a half times more. While war conditions did have more effect in heightening the contrast here, they were by no means entirely responsible, for, in 1915 New York City had more burglaries than happened in all England and Wales in the prewar years of either 1911, 1912, or 1913. Here, too, Chicago again holds its regrettable own. In 1917 it had three thousand four hundred and fifty-one more burglaries than London; in 1918, eight hundred and sixty-six more.

In such cities as Philadelphia, St. Louis, Los Angeles, and Washington, as compared with British cities of the same size, the same conditions in crime obtain. Indeed, Los Angeles, in 1917, for example, though only one-twentieth the size of London, had ten more homicides than the latter, and in the same year, Cleveland, one-tenth London's size, reported three times London's number of homicides.

Does it all mean that we are simply still temperamentally a young country with all of youth's impatience of rule? Surely we are not just naturally a most perverse people! Whatever the cause, there seems to be need for a bureau of social hygiene for more than merely to collect statistics. We would appear sadly to need being taken in hand in some way, if only to afford a little relief to our overworked guardians of the law.

TRAPPING REQUIRES GREAT SKILL

THOUSANDS of men and boys have been fascinated by the stories of great catches of fur. Machine-shop men in Detroit, clerks in New York, tailors in Chicago, and all kinds of indoor workers have decided to go to Alaska, or "just west of Hudson Bay," or to British Columbia to "trap for profit." With benign confidence, they expect to catch $100 foxes, $30 marten, $90 pekan, and all manner or wild life—enough to pay all expenses and to leave big wages over and above the cost.

The real trapper usually begins when a small boy; some, man-grown, learn to trap by reading Dick Wood, E. Kreps, Gibson, and other authorities on trapping. But no book will enable a man to go to Alaska and catch fur, without from one to three years' preliminary training and experience. One studies trapping books, as one studies arithmetic, geography, and algebra, and it takes the same length of study to prepare the tenderfoot for trapping that it requires to prepare a youth for banking, or any other commercial pursuit. Trapping, in real life, yields the thorough expert from $500 to $800 a year, average. The $1,500, $3,000, $5,000 catches are results of from ten to thirty years' wilderness knowledge and experience.

Moreover, a trapping outfit for the Canadian wilderness, Alaska, and the far-back places costs from $2,000 to $5,000, cash. Traps, 200 to 500, cost money—say $2.50 to $18 or so a dozen.

The skill and knowledge required literally demands that the trapper put a trap pan, containing three square inches where the wolf or pekan paw will step—the one place in a mile square, where the animal will, in its vagaries and habits and whimsicalities, step in a moment of abstraction.

The fact is, it is easier to learn to clerk in a store, or sell pancake flour on the road, than it is to catch even enough muskrats to "make a profit" on the investment. And yet, if one would learn to be a trapper, for the sake of going into the great outdoors, one may do so in two or three years with four or five dozen traps almost anywhere in the country.

A POPULAR FACULTY

THE man accustomed to meet great numbers of people, who has the faculty of being able to greet nearly every one he meets by his or her name, is always popular and sure to make friends. Some people are born with the faculty; others try, with more or less success, to acquire it. Theodore Roosevelt had the faculty to an unusual degree and a memory for faces and names that seemed at times almost uncanny. Few men in public life had so many friends as he, in so many different stations in life, from mechanics to congressmen and millionaires, and they were real well-wishers and whole-souled friends for the most part and their friendship was reciprocated.

To be greeted by name by any one he does not suspect of knowing him personally acts on many a man like a subtle form of flattery. It seems to imply that he is looked on as a person of some importance. Candidates for office make friends when they or their aides are able to recognize unexpectedly and address by name men who may influence votes.

Numbers of men accustomed as part of their daily avocations to meet many kinds of people, cultivate the habit of learning in some way, when possible, the names and recognizing the faces of the people they are to meet. Many local city or State politicians, an important part of whose canvassing methods is to make as many friends as possible, have reduced this system to a fine art. Salesmen of all kinds find it an invaluable help to them in building up business, and, before the late and present epidemic of strikes took place, heads of big business concerns found cheerful and willing workers when they could address most of their employees by name.

In some hotels of our big cities, there is now a system by which as many of the hotel clerks and other employees as practicable are able to address even casual visitors, who come very infrequently, by name. It gratifies many a quiet man who thought he was unknown in such a hotel when he asks the girl in charge of the telephone booths for a number and she replies, "Yes, Mr——" pronouncing his name before she gives the call.

This faculty of recognizing people unexpectedly met appears of late to be developing like an instinct. At political meetings in these days it is nearly always exercised and also at gatherings where speakers seek to interest people from whom contributions toward some popular project might be sought. Quiet men in large cities find themselves addressed so often now by name by people they thought never heard of them that the largest cities are beginning to seem to them not so large after all, and some of those who possess and exercise the faculty hold that its exercise aids a little in promoting good feeling and brotherhood generally.

HYPERBOLE AND EXAGGERATION

IN the Old Testament times, when languages had fewer words than now, hyperbole, by which exaggerated expressions emphasize the simple truth, was largely used. Children to-day, as well as uneducated people, whose vocabulary is limited, and even the educated use it at times.

The English language of the present time is richer in words than any other known tongue, though it may not be as musical as some of the other languages from which it has borrowed. And English-speaking people, as a rule, can express their ideas without resorting to hyperbole or exaggeration. Yet highly exaggerated statements are often made by both educated and uneducated people in describing notable incidents, and the

tendency to exaggeration is increasing rather than diminishing. An impulse of charity might, perhaps, lead one to assume that much of this exaggeration might be an unconscious tendency to hyperbole and that there might be fewer willful liars than is generally supposed.

Leaders in political or civic bodies, when fighting abuses, often go a step farther than mere exaggeration in their reports. The same thing applies to more important official reports, the source of which would be considered a guarantee for the presentation of the plain facts only. During the war with Germany an official account was given to the press of the United States of a dramatic conflict on the open sea between submarine fleets of the Allies and Central Powers, respectively. After it was published it was found that there were one or two isolated encounters between Allied and enemy submarines and that was all. It might be possible, by stretching a point, to assume such cases to be extreme instances of the use of hyperbole. Charitable people might be induced to accept this view—but with reservations.

Even hyperbole is not sufficient for many people, who in describing anything unusual, have a tendency to go far beyond the limits of both hyperbole and exaggeration. A man who once ran a local newspaper in a small northern seaport town in Ireland, and is now a citizen and resident of the United States, tells of a characteristic case of this kind. While he was running the paper a boatman brought to him a dead cuttlefish, found floating some distance from the shore, to learn what it was. As the man seemed fairly intelligent, the editor explained that it was a cuttlefish and that cuttlefishes, when pursued, squirted into the sea a fluid of inky hue, which nature provided in their bodies, clouding the water and thus facilitating their escape. Later he heard the boatman, with evident sincerity, explaining all about the cuttlefish to a comrade, as follows:

"That's what they call a scuttle fish. Scuttle fishes climbs up the masts of ships an' onto the riggin' an' squirts ink down on the sailors. How'd you like that if you were aboord?"

CASUALTIES OF COMMERCE

ALTHOUGH the recent contraction of credit is reflected in an increase of the number of commercial failures for 1920, as compared with those of 1919, the failures for this year will likely be less in actual number of concerns gone under than for any other year than 1919 since 1882. And in percentage of failure out of the total of concerns engaged in business the year 1920, though failures have increased toward the end of the year, bids fair to rank not far below the most prosperous year on record. If these days of business readjustment mean a certain amount of commercial depression, business at least seems likely to have time to prepare itself for new conditions, without being engulfed in any sudden cataclysm.

Bradstreet's gives the total of commercial failures for the nine months ended September 30, 1920, as 4,855—an increase of eighteen per cent over the same period of 1919. Liabilities of failed concerns, for this nine-month period of 1920, amount to $218,003,462, comparing with $90,690,377 for the corresponding period of 1919—an increase of one hundred and forty per cent, the magnitude of which is explained by a few 1920 suspensions involving particularly large liabilities. In fact, in the present test of dwindling markets and restricted credits, most of the 1920 failures, up to date, have been confined to the larger units of business.

Looking back, by way of comparison, over the immediate past, the year most fatal to business—in terms of the casualty percentage of all concerns operating—was that of 1915, when there was registered the failure of 1.32% of all houses active. The actual number of failures was over 22,000, with liabilities of about $300,000,000. That the amount of liabilities is not an exact indication of the percentage of bankrupted concerns, however, is shown by the fact that while the liabilities of 1914 were over $350,000,000 the percentage of failed houses was only 1.10% of those operating, as compared with the 1.32% for 1915.

For the whole period of the last half century, the worst year for business, in this country, was that of 1878, when out of 675,000 concerns 10,478 succumbed—a percentage of 1.55%. The liabilities for that year were some $230,000,000. Other disastrous

years were those of 1875—1877, with percentages of failure running from 1.10% to 1.31. The year of our smallest percentage of failure, as far as our records show, was the year just past, 1919, when the number of failures recorded, 6,553, amounted to only .38% of all concerns active.

POPULAR TOPICS

UNCLE SAM is the world's greatest dairyman. His cows produce more milk than the herds of all the rest of the world. Forty-three per cent of our milk is used in its natural form; thirty-four per cent of it is made into five hundred and sixty million pounds of butter; four per cent of it is used in making two hundred and thirty million gallons of ice cream; and four and three-quarters per cent of it is used in the manufacture of cheese.

FOR the year ending September 30th last, Canada's exports were valued at $1,219,-523,896—almost half of her national debt. Official estimates place the wealth of the Canadian people at sixteen billion dollars, and their aggregate annual income at two and a half billions.

THE Pennsylvania Railroad reports that it has brought about a substantial lessening in delays to its passenger trains. During September 129,745 trains lost 53,183 minutes. Last April 106,508 trains lost 60,792 minutes.

ONLY 6 per cent of the ships now sailing the seas are "windjammers." Coal-burning steamships form 76 per cent of the world's shipping, and oil-burning steamers 16.3 per cent. At the bottom of the list are vessels driven by internal combustion engines, 1.7 per cent of the total.

ON the evidence of the tax reports the American people didn't go in for simple living in 1919. The national "good-time" bill totals $22,700,000,000. Luxurious food cost $5,000,000,000; joy rides and visits to pleasure resorts and the races, $3,000,000,000; automobiles, $2,000,000,000; "luxurious services," $3,000,000,000; and candy, $1,000,-000,000. Other items on the list are: cosmetics and perfumes, $750,000,000; cigarettes, $800,000,000; cigars, $510,000,000; tobacco and snuff, $800,000,000; jewelry, $500,000,-000; soft drinks, $650,000,000; ice cream, $205,000,000; and chewing gum, $50,000,000. While we may shake our heads over some items of our national joy bill, there is one consolation—we might spend our money even more foolishly. For instance, it is reported that the German government has paid the ex-kaiser $25,000,000 since he decided upon a quiet life in Holland, and that ample financial care has been taken of the ex-royal princes.

PITTSBURGH has proved its right to the title of "Workshop of the World." During 1919 the industries of the Pittsburgh district produced manufactured goods valued at nearly $2,000,000,000. The per capita wealth of Allegheny County, in which Pittsburgh is located, is estimated at $2,580, the highest of any county in Pennsylvania. In 1919 employees in the district received $316,595,700 in wages, more than 70 per cent over what they were paid in 1916. Since 1916 there have been 124 new industrial plants established, and—especially pleasing to Pittsburghers—twelve new lines of industry have come to the district.

EMMA GOLDMAN and the rest of the two hundred and forty Russian anarchists deported to Russia from the United States are now mighty anxious to get away from the land of the red banner. Says the formerly fiery Emma: "We find it devilish hard to live in Russia."

A Modern Knight

By W. R. Hoefer

Author of "Ivory," "The Joke," Etc.

Being taken to the Gerard museum of historical exhibits didn't inject much culture into the Kerry Patch Kid, but it did have one result—it made him take on a fight that had no purse attached

"HAPPY" HARPER wasn't feeling so very happy this hot, oppressive July night. When the gong, terminating the third round sounded, he tottered to his corner, sank wearily upon the little stool thrust into the roped inclosure to receive his dusky bulk and grunted dispiritedly.

Happy felt pained in body and spirit. His feelings, as well as his frame had been injured. Besides being battered and bruised he was surprised and dazed as well. He had been confidently assured that his opponent, the "Kerry Patch Kid," who was reclining nonchalantly in the opposite corner of the ring as two perspiring, besweatered handlers worked industriously over him, was going to go along easily and allow him to stay the limit of ten rounds. Happy had depended upon this when he agreed to the match. He had expected an easy and quite peaceable time this evening. But instead, a gore-colored nose, puffed lips, sore, glove-tattooed ribs, to say naught of two knockdowns already from the flame-haired, furiously active Kid, bore mute testimony to the colored middleweight boxer that some one had prevaricated.

Either his big manager, "Husk" Schardt, had crossed Happy, or the Messrs. Sprackling and the Kid had double-crossed him.

"Ah thought," mourned Happy as Husk Schardt angrily soused his boxer's battered features with the dripping sponge from the water bucket, "Ah thought you done said this heah fight was fixed foh me to mingle the entiah ten rounds. A cakewalk you said. It's mo' like jazz music—with me gettin' the jazz an' that theah white boy gittin' the music."

Big Schardt glared down at his boxer as he picked up a towel and vigorously swung it.

"I thought so, too," he snarled. "But that guy 'Silk' and the Kid've slipped one over on us." He glared across the ring at the bored-looking Kid, and then at the latter's manager, sitting smilingly near the press box. "But never mind. I'll get that guy Silk for this. Meantime, you gotta do your best to stick it out. We're up against it. Go in and try to take it."

"*Try* an' take it," murmured the grieved Happy. "Boss, Ah just natchully *got* to take it;" which he did.

The bout ended abruptly in the following round. The usually tolerant Kid might have allowed the affair to last for another round or two, if his opponent, in a despairing effort to win, hadn't fouled. But after a minute of the round had passed Happy butted the other during a clinch, raised a lump over the Kid's right eye, and inadvertently raised a riot within the Kid himself. The referee broke them from the clinch, and the Kid, rushing in furiously, jolted his glove wickedly into the darky's body, and then, as the latter dropped his hands in pain, crossed his ponderous right glove over on Happy's jaw. Happy dropped his hands to his side, swayed unsteadily for a brief moment, and then sank limply to the ring floor. With the blow the riled Kid walked briskly to his corner, not even waiting to watch the referee's slow count over the fallen boxer. Happy was out and the Kid knew it. The punch had the knock-out feel in his gloved fist as it landed.

"Wait for the count, Terry," called a sport writer facetiously as the former stepped to the ropes. The Kid grunted disdainfully.

"When I hit 'em right they go down and they stay down a while," said he. "They could do all kinds of 'rithmetic on Happy before he pries hisself from the floor. They ain't no dinge can butt me and get away with it," and he climbed through the ropes to the tune of the roaring wave of sound that swept up from the assembled fans.

Back in their dressing room a little later,

the burly Schardt and the weary Happy Harper continued their discussion that had started between rounds back in the ring.

"Didn' yo'-all infohm me this heah fight was fixed to exist fo' the full limit of endurance?" demanded the colored pugilist as he slowly rubbed his bruised chin. "Yo' know Ah wouldn't nevah take no paht of the Kid's game if Ah thought it wasn't fixed that a way. How come he went aftah a knock-out, huh? Ah thought we was a-goin' along nice an' easy to a peaceable finish, an' heah he was jest honin' foh to commit a crime on me."

"I thought it was fixed, too," snapped Schardt, who was in no more peaceful frame of mind than his boxer, but whose rage was directed at Silk Sprackling, the urbane manager of the Kid. "Silk double-crossed us."

"How come he double-crossed us?" demanded the grieved Happy. "Yo'-all said he was friendly an' peaceable inclined toward us."

Schardt savagely bit the end from a cigar. "He didn't exactly promise me not to knock us out," he admitted, seeing that his glaring boxer was after the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth and meant to get it. "But by the same token he didn't say he *would* knock us out. I went to Silk when the match was made, and I says, 'Silk,' I says, 'you and me been good friends for a long time. Now Happy's a good meal ticket for me and it ain't any use in spoiling it. So why not leave the Kid carry Happy along for the route, and then we'll be in line for another bout with you later on.' That's what I says."

"An' then what did Mistah Silk say?" queried Happy.

"Why, he didn't say the Kid'd get rough."

"But what *did* he say?" persisted the other.

"Why," stammered the manager, "he didn't really say a dog-gone thing. He just lit up a cigarette, and he smiled in that smooth way he's got. But the way he acted I took it for a promise. He didn't right out say it was all right, but if he didn't think it was he had a right to tell me right then. You couldn't expect him to sign a paper saying he'd leave the Kid stall. Silk ain't exactly a sucker."

"An' yo' call that theah a promise," snorted Happy. "If that's a promise then Ah'm Theda Bara."

"It was the same as a promise," insisted Schardt. "And now he went and stuck one over on us."

"On *us*," groaned the other. "On *me*, you mean."

"On us, I mean. I lost a century note on you stayin'. But, never mind. I'll get that guy," he promised darkly. "The time'll come."

Meanwhile, the debonair Mr. Sprackling, all unconscious of the grieved feelings of the burly Husk Schardt, was smiling happily as he contemplated a little vacation. His wife had mentioned the subject to him only that morning, and now, with this bout out of the way, he was rather inclined to favor the idea.

"Terry," said he, as he stretched his long legs luxuriantly in the latter's dressing room at the boxing club, "I think we're due for a little vacation from the vicissitudes of the padded ring and the frenzied plaudits of the multitude. We've had some tough bouts lately. What do you say to a little trip out of Jersey and into a quiet, restful clime for a while. My wife was speaking of it only this morning."

"All right, Silk," replied the Kid, as he tossed a gore-stained five-ounce glove into a corner of the little dressing room.

"This July weather is getting pretty fierce," went on the other. "And, anyway, the fight clubs close down around here for a while. We don't want to go stale. Let's go; what?"

"Uh-huh," grunted the Kid. "Where to, Silk?"

"To Wakely, Massachusetts."

"All right," agreed the Kid. "Where's this Massachusetts, Silk?"

"Massachusetts," stated the other, "has been called a State of mind by the facetious, but it's really one of the foremost States in the Union. It's up around Boston. And you surely know where Boston is. Sam Langford and Mr. Coolidge live there. To be more definite, Massachusetts is bounded on the north by colonial pedigrees, on the south by diplomas, on the east by the cavorting cod, and the west by beans. They raise cranberries in Massachusetts and college degrees and Greek roots and world series champions and Tom Lawson once raised an awful howl, and Ponzi raised fourteen million dollars there on a shoe string and his nerve."

"'Zat so?" asked the Kid.

"All of it," responded Sprackling. "And

I really think, Terry, it would do you lots of good to go there and visit a new part of the country. Your ignorance of geography is colossal. You know the location of New York, Jersey, Kerry Patch, your bank, Frisco, the solar plexus, the knock-out button on the jaw and a few other places. But that lets you out. So you'd better come with us, what?"

"Uh-huh," agreed the Kid placidly, and that evening plans for leaving were perfected, and pretty little Mrs. Sprackling was informed by her husband that the redoubtable "Terry" Meagan, alias the Kerry Patch Kid, would join the party. Two days later the Sprackling entourage, consisting of the two Sprackлings, the flame-haired Kid, and the latter's valuable pedigreed bull pup, which Silk had named High Ball, because of the Kid's difficulty in obtaining him, arrived at the quiet, beautifully attractive little historical town of Wakely.

Mr. and Mrs. Silk immediately repaired to the home of relatives of the latter, the "Monty" Parkers, while the Kid and High Ball obtained quarters at a hotel. The Kerry Patch Kid much preferred the arrangement. For, while he found Monty Parker and his wife most charming young people, he instinctively felt that he would have little in common with them. For one thing, he discovered in his brief conversation with them at the depot that they were distressingly ignorant in certain subjects.

Mrs. Monty, for example, had never even heard of Jack Dempsey, and thought that Monsieur Carpentier was a French attaché at Washington; and while the Kid learned that Monty himself knew a left jab from a water bucket, having boxed at Harvard, he had never heard of some of the minor artists of the ring, such as "Willie" Meehan and "Mike" Ertle, and thought that "Tex" Rickard was a law-forbidden drink. Also, he had overheard Mrs. Monty remark to Mrs. Silk that it was too bad Silk persisted in following a horrid profession like boxing and wouldn't it be fine if he could be induced to take up the law for which he had been educated. Such an attitude, reasoned the Kid, could only result from gross ignorance. Why, most any one knew that the wallop is mightier than the brief in these days of plutocratic boxers and expensive knock-outs.

The Kid's estimate of educational values, however, was held only by himself, it seemed. For on the third day of their visit in Wakely Mrs. Sprackling, her pretty little head busied over a big idea, spoke to her husband regarding the Kerry Patch Kid.

"Teddy," said she, nestling against her husband as they sat in a swinging chair in the cool of the big front porch shortly after breakfast, "is Mr. Meagan busy, do you imagine?"

"The last I saw of Terry he was engaged with the hotel clerk," replied Sprackling, exuding a smoke ring toward a fleecy white cloud overhead. "I saw him there this morning, when I strolled down for a Boston paper."

"And did he seem so awfully busy? And at what?"

"Awfully," said Silk, fondly stroking her hand. "And at craps. He was six dollars and a half behind the clerk, and Elmer wouldn't let him double up. Why, honey?"

"Well," said she, her big eyes turned seriously up at her husband, "Ethel and I are going to visit the Gerard Museum here this afternoon. It has some of the rarest historical things in the country, you know. That terribly wealthy old Mr. Trincom, who died recently, left his entire collection to it, and the other exhibits are wonderful, too. They've a fine geological collection, and some plant-life things and tapestry and everything, as well as the historical things. So I thought of a plan. We'll bring Mr. Meagan along with us, and I'll take him in hand and try to improve his mind a little. It's been frightfully neglected, and the worst of it is he doesn't seem to worry."

"He should worry," commented Silk. "Terry can read—enough to dope out a set of fight articles and he can write—his check—for a pretty good amount. Of course he probably thinks Lord Byron used to umpire in the National League and that 'Buddy' Ensor wrote Paul Revere's ride, but he isn't going on a hunger strike because of that."

"Don't be silly, dear," she remonstrated. "I'm serious. I thought it would be interesting if we took Mr. Meagan with us, and while we had him there we could tell him about the exhibits, the dates and places and history of them, and in that way he'd be getting some geography and history and even a little literature and art."

"Not a bad idea, at that," replied Sprackling. "He ought to be inoculated with a little culture. His history is limited to who discovered the kidney punch. A sport sheet

is his sole idea of literature, and all the applied science he has he applies to an opponent in the ring."

Sprackling grinned to himself as he pictured the Kid in the toils of the two ladies. "It's a fine idea," said he, getting to his feet with energy. "A little later, if he stands up under the first dose, we can feed him Homer in the original with some free verse and a little Sanskrit on the side. I'll get him on the phone right now."

The Kid, somewhat to Sprackling's surprise, was by no means loath to visit the museum with the young ladies. He was finding life a bit dull and, "Sure, anything for excitement, Silk," he replied to the latter over the phone. Accordingly, that afternoon the two young ladies and the redoubtable Mr. Meagan repaired to the Gerard Museum.

It was some little time before the Kid displayed any signs of interest in the things he saw, however. The tapestries, over which the ladies went into raptures of ecstasies, interested him not at all. He glanced in noncommittal boredom at the plant-life exhibits and yawned openly at the geological specimens. A rock was a rock to the Kid, no matter where it came from, and a bit of vegetable growth, designated by a jaw-breaking Latin name might grow in Cape Town, South Africa, or Kerry Patch, for all the Kid cared.

Dates, descriptions, and locations were all one to the unenthused pupil, and little Mrs. Sprackling was finding her plan of sowing seeds of knowledge within the Kid's brain a rather barren effort, while Mrs. Monty Parker seemed to find the proceedings increasingly amusing. Even the exceptionally fine colonial exhibit in the south wing failed to arouse the desired enthusiasm in this modern knight of strife, although he did seem a bit enthused over the Revolutionary military uniforms. And his charming little mentor's fast dampening ardor in the cause was almost totally extinguished when the Kid failed to show the slightest interest in the prize exhibit of the place.

This was a battered-looking old pewter ale mug that was set off by itself in a special case. It was the single exhibit over which Wakely was the most intensely proud, for it had been presented to Major Jethro Whitcomb, one of the founders of the town, and a Revolutionary hero, by General George Washington himself. The mug, thought Alice Sprackling, simply *must* rouse his interest.

"This old pewter mug," announced the little lady impressively, "was used by General Washington less than a mile from here, in the Revolutionary war, when he stopped here."

"Yeah?" responded the Kid, with feigned interest.

"Think of it, Mr. Meagan, the great Washington drank out of that mug. You've even seen the house. It's that old mansion near the lake."

"'Zat so?" offered Terry, unimpressed.

"Yes, indeed," she replied, as they left for the final exhibit, that of ancient means of warfare and defense. It was here that the Kid's long slumbering enthusiasm was finally suddenly aroused and came to full bloom.

"What's that?" he asked suddenly, with a burst of vivid interest, pointing to an old suit of armor in a near-by case.

"That," explained Mrs. Monty, coming to the rescue of her companion," is an ancient suit of armor worn by an English knight in the fourteenth century. The brave knights went forth to battle in them in those days."

At the word "battle" the kid was instantly fired. "Battle!" he ejaculated. And he examined the ponderous affair minutely.

"Safety first for them birds, huh?" he went on, in some disgust. "A guy would sure break his hands on a bloke decorated with them armor plates. I don't see how yuh could ever knock 'em out—even with a horse shoe in your glove. They musta been some pikers in them days, huh, Mrs. Parker?"

"On the contrary, Terry," replied Mrs. Sprackling, rising to the opening given for imparting information to the Kid as a trout strikes at a fly, "they were unusually brave in those days. It was the age of chivalry. Knights went forth to do battle for their ladies in tourneys as well as in wars then. And often their only reward was a smile, or a glove or a rose from their ladies fair. And they didn't fight with their fists. They used swords, huge broadswords and lances and battle-axes."

"Axes?" asked the Kid in awe.

"Battle-axes; like this one," and his companion indicated a heavy, murderous-looking old battle-ax on exhibit near by. "And here's one of the lances they used for jousting. And here's a broadsword," and little Mrs. Sprackling took occasion to impart bits of ancient history to the now intensely inter-

ested Kid. Again and again he inspected the various objects of ancient punishment and defense.

"The age of chivalry," he repeated, half to himself. "Some age—the age of chivalry!"

"It was a wonderful age, Mr. Meagan," exclaimed Mrs. Monty in a glow. "It was the age of romance."

"It musta been," agreed the awed Kid. "You busted a guy over the dome with a ax and you stuck him in the eye with a spear and you tried to shave his Adam's apple with a double-decker sword—if you could bust through his armor plate. Then if his tin-can uniform still hung together or he slipped your wallops or blocked your punches he busted you right back. Some age of chivalry, I'll say. I bet they didn't even weigh in, in them days, huh?"

"Weigh in?" exclaimed both ladies.

"I mean I bet bantams would even mingle with middleweights then, and a welter would maybe challenge a heavy. Why, gee whiz, with axes they might even lick Dempsey. And then if you did arrange to bust open a guy or poke a bloke with your spear so's he did a brodie offen his nag you didn't even cop off a decent purse, huh? A dame slipped you a joy look or slung a glove or a rose at yuh or some'pn."

That evening the Kid described his visit to the amused Sprackling.

"Some way of havin' bouts in them chivalry days, hey, Silk," he declared that evening. "The announcer yells, 'In this corner "Battle-ax" Hogan, an' in this corner "Armor-plate" Riley; they'll scrap to a finish for a dame's glove an' a smile.' I bet fight managers got fat in them old days, hey Silk. Maybe they could even sling rocks in them bouts, too. Some rough boys I gotta admit, them old chivalry blokes."

"So you enjoyed your trip, eh?" asked Sprackling.

"You said 'er, kid," replied the other with emphasis. "I gotta go back there and inspect them swords an' meat cleavers some more. Why, they got one big ax there the sign says was used by Sir Guy Something in the days of this old Richard the Lion Lung: he——"

"Lion-hearted, you mean," corrected Sprackling.

"Lion-hearted, then," agreed the Kid. "Anyway, he must of been a strapping big heavyweight to swing that meat cleaver. Bigger'n Willard even. You could slice up a elephant with it."

Almost daily, in the following week, the Kid was seen in the museum, browsing through the exhibit that seemed to fascinate him. He fairly itched to get into the cases, take out the weapons, and swing them about. He wanted to get the feel of them. He wanted to examine them at closer hand and mentioned the fact a number of times to an attendant there.

The Kid's overpowering interest in the weapons of warfare of the battlers of a bygone age so excited the risibilities of Monty Parker that he mentioned the affair to a friend in Wakely, who repeated it to another who, in turn, retold the story to still another. It soon came to the recipient ears of Clem Bowditch, the editor of the local paper who wrote a quite humorous story about it and the redoubtable Kid in his sheet, and before long the whole town was engulfed in a wave of laughter. Soon, not only the local citizens but many others chuckled over the Kid's devouring interest in the war implements of a long-ago period and in his avid appetite for knowledge in any way relating to the days when knighthood was in flower. The story was copied in the New York sport sheets. The fight fans read it and grinned; and Silk Sprackling read it and chuckled.

"Great advertising for us," said the knowing Silk. But just when the Wakely merriment was at its height a sudden gloom was cast over the little town.

Mrs. Sprackling broke the news to the others one evening as the Parkers, Sprackling, the Kid, and High Ball were seated upon the Parkers' big porch, in the cool of the evening, after dinner.

"The museum was broken into early this norning," tragically announced Alice Sprackling, almost in tears, as she hurriedly came up the steps. "They tried to keep it quiet for a time, but the news is out now. Some thief robbed the museum—and it's gone."

The Kid straightened up suddenly, a fearful suspicion breaking upon him.

"What's gone?" he almost shouted. "That big ax of Sir Guy What's-his-name? They didn't cop that, did they, Mrs. Sprackling?"

"I wish they had," almost wailed little Mrs. Silk. "They took the pewter mug. The one that was owned by George Washington. Nothing else was touched." At the news the Kid breathed a voluminous sigh of relief.

"Holy cats, I thought they might of swiped the big meat cleaver," said he, with a relieved grin.

His relief wasn't shared by the rest, however. Not only the two ladies on the porch but the entire town, almost, was up in arms over the theft. The pewter mug, the famous mug of colonial fame—gone! Shades of George Washington and Jethro Whitcomb! Who had dared to do this monstrous thing? The local authorities threatened and raved. Big newspapers like the New York *Times* and the Boston *Transcript* even wrote editorials about the loss of this famous colonial relic. But one day, two days, a week passed, with no sign of the culprit or the mug.

And then, with the indignation of Wakely still boiling and blazing the attention of Sprackling and the Kid was turned from the museum and local affairs to matters of their own.

"Eddie" Cleary, the promoter of the Arena, at Lawrence, indicted a letter to the manager; the latter considered it carefully with mingled thoughts, was about to decline the offer made by Cleary, then finally decided to put the matter up to the Kid himself.

"Terry," said he, as he interrupted the Kid in his scuffling match with High Ball in the lobby of the hotel, "how would you like a bout—in two weeks?"

"Sure," said the Kid, lifting the frollicking bull pup to his lap. "Whereat?"

"At Lawrence; in the open-air Arena there," replied Sprackling. "I didn't expect to box during a vacation, but this looks pretty soft. Eddie Cleary tells me he can put us on with a chap named "Bruiser" Belloc. I don't think he's as bad as his name. In fact, I've never heard of him before, and Eddie says it'll be just a little canter for us in his opinion. Ten rounds, no decision, and fifteen hundred dollars."

"Sure, Silk. Anything you say. You just get 'em in for me, an' I'll knock 'em out."

"This Bruiser person, Eddie informs me, is a light heavy practically. In fact, he'll come in at around a hundred and seventy, and it'll have to be at catchweights. But he has no reputation, so that won't make any difference."

"Sure not, Silk," said the Kid. "Anything you say." And Sprackling went to Lawrence to complete arrangements for the bout.

"There's just one thing I didn't mention in my letter," said Cleary, as he and Sprackling sat in the former's soft-drink parlor in Lawrence, to sign the boxing agreement. "You'll have to post a thousand dollars for appearance."

Sprackling lit a cigarette and smiled. "What's the idea?" he asked. "Is Bruiser afraid we'll jump out of the ring?"

"It isn't Bruiser," said Cleary. "It's his manager, Fraley. He claims he's taking no chance. He says Bruiser's made a pretty fair record down around New Orleans, and he'll come in heavier than the Kid, and he doesn't want the Kid to get cold feet at the last minute. So he wants appearance money posted."

"He can have it," agreed Sprackling easily, and gave Cleary a check for a thousand dollars. "By the way, Eddie, who's this Fraley person? I never heard of him before."

"Neither did I," said Cleary, with a reminiscent grin. "He looks like a minister, but he claims he's a fight manager and that the Bruiser's some fighter."

"Well, if he is a minister maybe he'll have to resume his profession when Terry gets through with his protégé," grinned Sprackling.

There was a little plaintive remonstrance from Mrs. Sprackling when she heard of the coming bout, but her good-looking husband quickly pacified her. "It won't interfere with our vacation, honey," said he. "This is just a little easy change for us. I'll be here with you most of the time, and Terry'll train here down near the lake."

The Kerry Patch Kid had no difficulty in getting into good condition in the small time allotted for training. He was an industrious worker and always kept in excellent fettle anyway. When the day of the bout approached the Sprackling camp had no misgivings for the result. Sprackling was obliged to be in Lawrence the morning of the bout, which was scheduled for the afternoon, while the Kid was to stay in Wakely until noon, and it was arranged that the boxer was to meet the manager at the Arena when the first preliminary went on about two o'clock.

Promptly at two o'clock the club announcer scrambled through the ropes of the Arena and announced the first bout, between two bantamweights. Sprackling, standing near the main entrance to the place glanced out on the street, casually, for sight of the Kid. The latter was not discernible in the offing.

"A little late," thought the manager. "I'll go in and see this bout. Terry knows where his dressing room is," and he sauntered through the sweltering crowd to a seat near the ringside. The bout was lively and interesting, and went the limit of six rounds. At its conclusion Sprackling again went to the entrance to wait for his boxer. And still no Terry was in sight. The second bout went on—and Sprackling became a bit restive.

With the third bout over both Cleary and Sprackling became anxious and restless. The main bout was next and one of the main principals was nowhere in sight. After a short wait, Belloc, attired in a red-and-white checked bath robe sauntered down the aisle, climbed through the ropes, and glanced over the crowd carelessly. A moment later his manager, Fraley, and two handlers entered the ring. There was a desultory cheer for the Bruiser as he doffed his bath robe and took his seat in one corner while his seconds adjusted his bandages, but the perspiring crowd was saving it's real enthusiasm for the Kid, a favorite because of his oft-exhibited aggressiveness and hitting ability.

Sprackling noted that Belloc was a sturdily built youth and looked in great shape. He was black-haired, gloomy-browed, and seemed formidable if mere appearance indicated anything. His manager, a little, thin, shrewd-looking man, whom Sprackling seemed faintly to recall having seen somewhere, did, indeed, as far as his garb and general appearance went, look more like a clergyman than a fight manager.

By this time, the crowd was becoming restless and impatient. Cries for the Kid sounded from all over the house. Cleary hurried over to Sprackling in despair.

"Where's your man, Silk," he asked pleadingly. "It's time for the bout to go on?"

"Where?" echoed Silk in disgust. "I'll phone Wakely and see if Terry's left there."

The hotel clerk informed Silk that the boxer had left some time ago. Sprackling did some rapid thinking. "Kidnaped," was his first thought. Then he phoned the Parker residence. It was Mrs. Sprackling's voice, a bit tremulous, that floated over the wire.

"Honey," asked Sprackling, "have you folks by any chance seen Terry? He hasn't appeared here. They're holding up the bout."

There was a little choke in the voice that answered. "Mr. Meagan," replied the voice, "won't be there at all."

"What!" gasped he. "Why not, Alice?"

"Because," was the indignant answer, "he's right here in the county jail. They got him here about noon. He's held for stealing the—the—the——" and the voice trailed off into nothing.

"The what, honey?"

"The *pewter mug*." The reply was a mingled burst of horror and pain. "Think of it, Teddy," she wailed. "Isn't it terrible? Terry—the mug—the wonderful, famous, historical Washington relic!"

Sprackling snapped up the receiver. "Well—I'll—be—damned," said he, unsuccessfully fumbling for a milder word. He explained the facts to Cleary, who in turn did some violent exclaiming.

"You'll have to call the bout off," said Sprackling.

"Sure, I'll have to call it off," stormed Cleary. "And return a wad of money or have the fans make kindling wood out of my Arena." When the announcement was made that the Kerry Patch Kid was unavoidably detained and would not appear and the tumult and the shouting and the catcalls had died and the place was finally cleared of spectators, Sprackling turned to leave the Arena office for his dismal return to Wakely. But a voice stopped him.

"Torrid weather we're having, isn't it, Mr. Sprackling," said the voice, a note of glee in it. Sprackling turned to face little Fraley and big Belloc, both grinning widely and the latter with a check in his huge hands.

It *was* torrid weather—and getting more torrid for Sprackling each moment. He glanced at the check. It was his own, for a thousand dollars appearance money. He had completely forgotten it in the excitement. Silk mopped his dripping brow and things began to dawn upon him. He smiled evenly as he eyed the two.

"There is," said Silk suavely, "something decidedly putrid about this entire affair. I don't know what it is—yet, Mr. Fraley. But I will. I seem to faintly recall that visage of yours—and your mournful garb."

The others laughed boisterously. "Easy coin, bo," chuckled Belloc evilly. "Softer'n fightin' for it."

"Crooks of a feather steal together," murmured Silk, looking keenly at the others. Then he smiled in spite of himself. "And

it looks like pretty smooth work, too. Not a bit coarse. But, Mr. Fraley," he continued, "I can assure your rough-necked, evil-looking friend here that it was decidedly fortunate for him that the bout didn't go on. Terry dislikes filthy crooks and crooks' dirty cat's-paws."

Belloc guffawed at this. "Say, you," rasped he thickly, "talkin' about crooks, that red-headed mick is the biggest crook I know. You got some crust gassin' about crooks. Why Meagan's in jail right now. An' as for scrappin' that boob, I can trim him any old time I try. You can ease that info into him, too!"

Sprackling's snapping eyes belied the smile on his lips as he turned to the husky Belloc. "I'll deliver your message to Terry," said he evenly. "And though you outweigh him fifteen or twenty pounds, I can promise you that if you'll write that message on paper he'll make you eat your own words or force 'em down your throat."

"Say," rasped Belloc, "that mick couldn't lick me with a riot gun—tell him that, too, will ya?"

"I assuredly will," promised Sprackling.

Upon his return to Wakely Sprackling learned that things looked black for the Kerry Patch Kid. The local populace was furious and threatening. No suspicion had attached itself to the Kid until the arrival in town of a stranger, who definitely accused Meagan of the theft. The stranger, so Clem Bowditch informed Silk, swore he had seen the Kid near the museum shortly before the discovery of the missing of the relic. He promised to testify to this in court. The arrest had followed soon after.

At the county jail Sprackling found his boxer in a state of open wrath.

"Where do they get that noise," demanded the Kid hotly. "Who'd swipe that little old suds mug, huh?"

"It's all right, Terry," assured Sprackling. "I'll get you out of this. Of course, you didn't steal it. I suspect this Fraley person knows something about the whole thing. I've seen him somewhere before, too. Where *have* I seen that chap. Where in——" Then he sprang to his feet suddenly. "I've got it," he shouted in excitement,

"Got what, Silk?" asked the other.

"Fraley," cried Sprackling. "He isn't Fraley; he's "Parson" Zimmer. See you later, Terry," and he sprang from the cell door for the sheriff's office down the jail corridor.

"Say," he shouted to the surprised sheriff, "what did that chap look like who's accusing Terry?"

"Big guy," replied Sheriff Darnly. "Didn't like his looks much, either. Big nose, big jaw, mean little eyes. Got a tin ear—looks like he might have been a fighter. I don't think the Kid swiped that mug myself. That big gent looked phony to me right off."

"Where is he?" asked the other.

"Said he was stopping at Larkin's Hotel, near the square. Promised to stay until we wanted him to testify." Sprackling left the office on the run. He had a suspicion that the stranger had no idea of remaining in town. He ran to the hotel and interviewed the clerk. Yes, a big man of that description had been staying there, but he'd left just a few minutes ago with his bag. A telegram had come for him asking him to meet two friends at the depot. Again Sprackling took it on the run, this time for the depot.

On the station platform he saw a big man nervously pacing the platform. Sprackling took one thorough look at the stranger, made a flying leap, and brought the man down with a beautiful flying tackle. A fierce struggle ensued whereat the station agent, the baggage man, and several bystanders rushed up.

"Hold this man," yelled Silk. "He's a crook." Several others held the sputtering, struggling stranger. A few moments later Sprackling reappeared with a police officer.

"Arrest him," demanded Silk. "He's guilty of fraud; he's a crook. He's falsely imprisoned Terry Meagan; he may even have stolen the Washington relic." At the last phrase the crowd became even more excited, and it was with difficulty that the officer got him away. A few minutes later the three were in the county jail.

"And now," said Sheriff Darnly, as he looked over the excited trio in the jail office, 'what's all this blooming fuss about, anyway, Mr. Sprackling."

"Release Terry from the confines of his cell apartment and I'll tell you," was the reply. The sheriff brought the Kid to the office. At sight of the burly stranger the boxer stopped.

"Husk Schardt," he cried.

"None other," said Sprackling. "He's the author of your little skit entitled 'Pinched in Wakely.'"

"He is, huh?" roared Meagan, making a rush for Schardt.

"This man," explained Sprackling, when the others had restrained the infuriated Kid, "is named Schardt. He was once a boxer and a crooked one. He's now a fight manager —and still crooked. A short time ago he tried to get us to fake a fight with a colored middleweight of his, and when Terry sent poor Happy Harper kicking I imagine Husk became a bit peeved. I can see it all now. He read of the theft here and the joking newspaper yarns of Terry's frequent visits to the museum and he ribbed up this match with Belloc. I see now that his sole idea was to nick us for a thousand dollars forfeit money through having Terry in jail when the bout was due. He never intended the fight to come off at all. And stay here to testify against Terry? Why, he had no idea of doing it. He was waiting for two pals at the station to beat it back to New York when I hailed him at the depot. He ——" The speaker was interrupted just then by a scuffling sound outside the office, and the next moment a police officer appeared with two sullen, struggling victims.

"Got 'em at the station," explained the officer. "You told us to keep an eye peeled for phony-lookin' strangers on account of the G. Washington mug bein' lifted; an' these two dodos couldn't answer my questions."

"Welcome to our jail," hailed Sprackling at sight of the newcomers. "If it isn't my two bosom friends, Mr. "Phony" Fraley and Mr. Belloc."

"Well, what've ya got on us, anyways?" demanded Belloc. "A guy's got a right to come into town, ain't he?"

"Assuredly," replied Sprackling. "But whether he can get out again or not is quite another matter. Where's that certified check of mine for a thousand dollars. You've still got it. You couldn't cash it, with the banks all closed."

"You got a fine, fat chance of gettin' it," jeered Belloc.

"I'll say so," chuckled Schardt.

"Get it from this man Belloc, sheriff," demanded Sprackling. "It was obtained by fraud. Fraley here is known as Parson Zimmer. He was associated with Schardt in crooked fights in Jersey and other places. I recall him now. And the three have ribbed up this entire fake deal of imprisoning Terry just to get a little easy change out of me!"

"Sorry, Mr. Sprackling, but I can't turn it over to you until it's proved in court that it was obtained by fraud. I've no doubt it was. And you won't have any trouble proving it, I guess," said the sheriff dryly. "But unless they give it up now, of their own free will, I can't legally turn it over to you. Just sue for it. You'll get it all right."

"And I guess that lets you out, you poor sucker," chuckled Belloc. "I got my cut comin' from the check, and there ain't no boob fight manager gonna keep me from gettin' mine."

"Oh, you'll get yours all right," promised Sprackling, "after I inform Terry of your message. Terry," turning to the Kid, "this big specimen of crooked collusion, who parades under the term fighter but who's so yellow he'd bleed lemon juice if you cut him, said you were a dirty crook and a boob and to tell you the message came from him direct. Moreover he insists he can trim you any old time he wants."

"And I can, too, the red-headed mick," roared the now thoroughly angry Belloc, infuriated by the contemptuous tone and remarks of Sprackling.

"You can!" roared Meagan, attempting another rush, "why, you big——"

"Just a minute, gentlemen," said Sprackling, "if I may be so untruthful as to call this big, yellow hound Belloc a gentleman and——"

"Call me yellow," roared the infuriated Belloc. "I'll fight this bird any time."

"As I was about to say," resumed Sprackling, "I'll keep these three crooks in jail here, anyway, and sue for that check. Don't worry, Terry."

"Terry better worry," snapped Schardt, "'cause I'm gonna keep *him* in jail, too, for swipin' that mug."

Terry Meagan spoke up. "Are you willin' to fight me, right here?" he demanded of Belloc.

"Yes, I am," howled Belloc. "I'll make you take back that yellow stuff."

"All right, then," said the Kid. "I'll fight this guy right here. He says I'm a crook. Schardt is keepin' me here in a phony deal, but if Belloc tells what he knows, it won't stand. You an' me, Silk, say this Belloc's got a yellow streak up and down his spine, an' he claims he ain't. Now we'll make this a scrap for our honor like them old

birds in the chivalry days. I hate to scrap without gettin' a soft purse—it don't look right in a fighter nowadays; but I'll do it."

"Terry, be careful," warned Sprackling, a note of pain in his voice. "Think what you're doing. Why it's a disgrace for a boxer to put on a glove these days without getting a lot of soft money. You wouldn't demean our profession by giving something for nothing."

"Sure I would," retorted the angry Kid. "I'd do it for my honor. Just like this old Richard the Lion Lung——"

"Lion-hearted," corrected Silk.

"Lion-hearted," agreed the Kid. "We'll fix it this way: If that guy can lick me, I'll say he ain't yellow, they can keep that old check, and we withdraw our claim that they're crooked. If I beat him, Belloc tells the sheriff here the truth, which is that I didn't cop that mug and that Schardt knows it. Then they give us back the check and I get out of jail, a innocent guy. If them old geezers in them chivalry days could scrap with meat cleavers and lances 'n everything for a dame's smile and a rose, I guess I got spunk enough to scrap with five-ounce gloves for my good name and my freedom from this booby hatch."

"All right," said Silk. "But he's got a lot of weight on you." Meagan snorted disdainfully at that. Then Schardt protested. "Nothing doing," said he. "I won't withdraw my charge against Meagan."

"You don't have to," snapped Belloc. "I know the dope. I'll tell the real yarn, if he licks me. And I got that check right here in my jeans, too, and I'll turn it over—if the poor boob licks me."

The sheriff was inclined to demur at the arrangement at first. It wasn't "regular," said he. Then the police officer spoke up.

"Oughta be some mill," said he, glowing. "You know the Kid—and this other boy looks good. And we'd 'a' paid five-fifty for only a limited-round bout, if it was held in Lawrence. These boys're gonna go to a finish."

The sheriff hesitated, hemmed, and hawed, considered the dignity of his position, then alternately visualized the bout to a finish—and gave his consent.

It was now about eight o'clock. The prison yard, the logical place for the affair, was dark. The office was too small. The sheriff considered the matter of a site. Finally he decided upon a space upon the ground floor of the jail, off at the rear end of the building and away from the inmates.

"Concrete floor," stated the sheriff's secretary. "They might get killed."

"There's a great big, thick rug—used to be in the mayor's reception room at the city hall—stored away upstairs," replied Darnly.

The rug was laid, water pails, bottles, and sponges were brought, two pairs of five-ounce gloves were procured from Belloc's suit case, and the two boxers stripped to the waist. The sheriff agreed to referee, the police officer volunteered as timekeeper, Parson Zimmer and Husk Schardt were the handlers for the burly Belloc while Sprackling and the sheriff's secretary were behind the Kid.

It was a weird setting for a boxing match between two professionals. And the affair itself was wholly incongruous in its inception. Here were two boxers, with their managers concerned in an affair of reputation instead of money. If Belloc won he was to be absolved, publicly and freely, of the taint of yellowness. If Meagan triumphed he was to be freed of the charge of theft without court proceedings or further action.

From the start, Sprackling saw that Eddie Cleary's appraisal of the burly Belloc was a correct one. Though a recent arrival, he was good. The Kid would have to make the fight of his career to best him. And from the first blow it was easily seen that, though a finish fight, the bout might easily not be a long one. The two boxers went in viciously from the start.

Belloc rushed from his corner furiously and landed first, a savage half-right-hand swing to the body. The Kid countered wickedly, and there was a fierce exchange of savage, ripping punches before they clinched. The sheriff broke them free, and again they stood toe to toe, swapping slams. At the close of the round the small group of tense spectators knew that a real fight, not a boxing exhibition, was in prospect.

The second round was even faster. There was but one clinch, the remainder of the time the Kid and Belloc rushed and swung, ripped in tearing jabs, lightninglike jolts, fierce uppercuts and swishing, fierce hooks. Belloc connected with a hard swing in the middle of the round that brought the blood to Meagan's nose in a stream, as he went to his corner. The instructions from the seconds were given in low, tense tones, and the applause was equally tense and quiet.

The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth rounds were about even affairs, with both boys absorbing terrific punishment. Belloc's eyes were both cut and bleeding freely, and there were raw, red spots on his body from the Kid's savage, short-arm body punching, while the Kid's mouth was badly cut and his nose continued to bleed freely in each round.

The sheriff's secretary, a pale-looking young chap, was looking a bit whiter with each passing round. He wasn't used to so much blood. The sheriff was grunting in delight with each smacking exchange, and the handlers were tensely keeping track of each punch and its effect.

"Can't last much longer," almost whispered the sheriff to the policeman after the seventh round. "Lord, what a fight!"

"Fight," said the burly officer in awe. "It's a massacre!"

The eighth round passed and the ninth and tenth with the spectators still tensely waiting for a decisive break. Thud, thud, thud—the sound of the gloves upon flesh sounded cruelly upon the listening ears. First, the Kid seemed irresistible and a sure winner, then Belloc, rallying, appeared to hold the upper hand. In the eleventh round the first decided sign of superiority appeared. Belloc's greater weight was telling, and his longer reach was becoming increasingly effective. There was a short, desperate clinch by the Kid, the beautifully muscled arms and backs of the boxers writhed, turned, jerked, and twisted, glistening with perspiration under the rather dim electric lights of the jail; the sheriff stepped in and broke them free. Then, just as the Kid, gore-smeared and tired-looking, was stepping back, Belloc hooked a lightninglike right to the Kid's jaw, the latter swayed a moment unsteadily, then reeled, flopped heavily to the rug, rolled over once and lay still.

"One, two, three——" counted the sheriff slowly.

"Terry," called Sprackling desperately. The Kid slowly moved.

"Four, five——" continued the sheriff, his arm waving slowly up and down.

"Terry, think of the thousand," Sprackling called to the prostrate boxer. The latter didn't stir.

"Six——" continued the sheriff.

"Think of Richard the Lion-hearted," Sprackling was calling in an agony of hope. With the sheriff's "six" the Kid heard the word lion-hearted. He shook his carroty head, got to one knee, slowly, muttered "good old Lion Lung," just as the referee said "eight," and was on his unsteady legs at "nine." Belloc made a rush, the Kid weakly clinched, and the gong sounded. The minute's rest rapidly recuperated the wonderfully conditioned Kid.

"Watch his right hook," cautioned Sprackling, as he sponged the crimson-faced Kid off. "He's clipping you with it right along. Beat him to it."

Meagan stayed out of danger by covering up and clinching in the twelfth round. He held the bigger boxer evenly in the thirteenth, and in the fourteenth had a slight edge. He was avoiding that wicked right hook now and scoring savagely with his own. In the fifteenth round Belloc landed a swift, rapierlike jab, and as the Kid's head bobbed back the bigger boy, thinking he saw the opening he had been waiting for, stepped in fast and started a right swing with all his strength. It was just a fractional second too late, however.

Meagan instinctively sensed the effort and hooked his left to the body. Agony appeared in Belloc's tired face as his guard dropped, and then, almost before the spectators could follow the blow, the Kid's ponderous right whipped across and landed flush in Belloc's jaw.

"Right on the button," murmured the sheriff as Belloc dropped to his hands and knees and then sprawled limply over on his face. The sheriff need not have counted at all. It was fully five minutes before Belloc was completely revived. Then, as he sat limply in his corner, the Kerry Patch Kid walked slowly over and spoke.

"Did I swipe that G. Washington mug?" he asked.

"No," replied Belloc with a weak, sickly sort of grin. "We don't know who done that. Schardt framed this thing to get square with Silk for you trimmin' Harper an' losin' him some coin."

"Am I a crook?"

"Nope."

"Where's that check?" asked Sprackling. Belloc got it and turned it over to its owner.

"I'm sorry I got in this," stated Belloc to the Kid. "I come up from the South an' I couldn't get any matches. I was broke, an' this Schardt knew it. So that's how I come to get in this bout that never was to of been fought."

The Kid shook hands with Belloc. "An'

while you didn't lick me, bo," said he, "I gotta say, right here, you ain't yellow," and he rubbed his swollen face.

Two days later Monty Parker brought the news to the Spracklings and Mrs. Monty that the famous relic was recovered. An attendant had taken it and sent it to New York to a friend, where the latter was apprehended while trying to dispose of it to a curio dealer. The four were sitting on the big Parker porch when Monty drove up in his car with the news.

"Some trouble that little old mug brung us, hey, Silk?" murmured the Kid, when the news was told.

"Poor Terry," said Mrs. Silk, glancing at the Kid's bruised visage.

"Still an' all," mused the Kid, gazing into space, "it brung somethin' besides trouble. If it hadn't of been for that little old mug, Mrs. Sprackling wouldn't of brung me to the museum. An' then I wouldn't of heard of this chivalry stuff, or saw them big meat cleavers an' all or heard tell of old Richard the Lion Lung."

"Lion-hearted," corrected Sprackling.

"Lion-hearted," assented the Kid. "An' so now I got a swell idea, Silk."

"What is it, Terry?" asked the other, leisurely lighting a cigarette.

"Let's you an' me take that thousand bucks we didn't lose to Husk Schardt an' slip it to the Gerard Museum. Them museums do lotsa good. They improve a bloke's education. They slip him some culture, just like Mrs. Sprackling says."

Sprackling sent a smoke ring aloft toward the heavens.

"You're on, Terry," said he. "We'll start a fund—for historical research work."

"Splendid," cried the two ladies in unison.

"And," offered Monty Parker, "I'll add a thousand, and we'll call it the 'Terry Meagan Fund,' open to other contributors."

The Kid blushed violently. Then he coughed loudly to cover his embarrassment.

"Them old chivalry boys sure were some game old guys," said he finally.

"They were, indeed," assented Mrs. Monty.

"Especially," added Terry, "this old Richard the Lion Lung you been tellin' me about."

"Lion-hearted," corrected Sprackling gravely.

"Lion-hearted," agreed the Kerry Patch Kid.

"The Sell-Out," by Mr. Hoefer, will appear in the next number.

THE CHAMPION MEAN MAN

IN the clerk's office of a county in the State of North Carolina there is recorded an old farmer's will making a bequest to his widow. The paragraph in question reads:

"To my beloved wife, Catherine, I devise and bequeath all the clothes and wearing apparel which she may have at the time of my decease."

In another county in the same State there is on record the following bill of sale:

"This indenture made this 14th day of December, eighteen hundred and four, between Abner Willis of the State of North Carolina and County of Carteret, the one parte and William W. Oliver, of the other parte.

"Witnesseth: That, Abner Willis, have bargained and delivered unto Wm. W. Oliver one serten white woman by the name of Marce, which is or was formally my wife, for the sum of two dollars, the recept I hereby acnolidge myself truly satisfied. In witness hearof I place my hand and seal the day and year first written

His
ABNER X WILLIS.
Mark

"Signed, sealed and delivered in presence of Benj. Lecraft."

The Broken Peace Pipe

By Buck Connor

Author of "Cloud Man's Hunt," "Smilin' Chaupo," Etc.

"Boots" Braden liked people to admire his dogs, but he did not figure on anybody's appreciating them in the way those Indians did

"WHERE will I find Dean Steale?" I heard a voice outside the office door asking one of the chandelier men.

"Right in there," and apparently he nodded toward our little winter-quarters office.

I swung around in my chair expectantly and watched the door swing slowly open—I was getting used to people looking me up, and, before starting on answering a stack of letters from engagement seekers, I waited to see who it was that was wanting me now.

"Well, I'll be switched—how are you, Dean?" "Boots" Braden, a wealthy clubman and all-around sportsman of Richmond, came rushing over and wrung my hands.

"Sit down," I told him, and shoved a chair under him and handed over my cigarettes for a smoke. I was truly glad to see Boots. "How have you been?"

"Pretty well," he says. "Just saw the colonel over in New York, and he tells me you're hitting the trail toward Rainbow—going out after your Indians?"

"Yep. Just as soon as I get all these letters answered, and Austin comes back with the ticket I sent him after, I'll be hiking out."

"Well, listen! Why can't I go along with you this time? I won't bother your work. It will be company for you."

"I guess you can, as far as I know. I'd be glad to have you make the trip," I told him. "I want to get out of here for New York to-night. So if you're going, I'll meet you at the Pennsylvania Station at six o'clock, and we'll catch that express."

Boots got up and looked at his watch and set it with my own, told me just where he would be standing in the station, and walked on out and down toward the car line.

On board the Chicago Flyer we got ourselves located and walked into the dining car. While we waited for our dinner, Boots told me why he wanted to make the trip.

"You see, Dean, I've just about finished a wonderful bungalow out near the country club, and I have had built in it a room which I call 'Out There'—meaning, of course, anything and everything I can gather west of the Missouri and east of the Needles. I want to meet some of those boys you had out to my place last year, and see what I can pick up from them for decorations for the room—those things the chiefs wear and what they beat their music on."

"Oh, I see! War bonnets and tom-toms," I amended.

"That's it—anything that you say will make the place look like something besides having just plain bare walls."

"I get you," I encouraged him.

"You know, down home, the folks are all getting anxious about my house warming, and I don't want them to peep inside the place till it is fixed up so they will get blind staggers when they see it. I have laid aside a couple of thousand dollars to doll it up with—think that will be enough? If it isn't I'll come across with more until we do have enough."

"Have you any pictures of that room with you?" I asked. I was trying to visualize a scheme for decorating the place for him.

"No, I haven't—I've just got a drawing here that shows the interior of the place. We'll go back to the observation car when we're finished and have a smoke and look it over."

When we had finished the dinner, we went to it.

Golly, Boots sure had a master of an architect on that Out There room—the drawing looked almost like a photograph. I spread it out on a table in the buffet compartment and studied it, while Boots looked on and waited for any suggestions. I didn't make any right then, but I did make a mental pic-

ture of that room togged out in the different things I had in mind for it. I saw an opening for a painting, and thought of every kind of a ceremony as a canvas subject, and my mind finally rested on the Great Council.

I told Boots about it—described it to him from the smaller ones I had seen. I went on telling him how the great chiefs from the different tribes of the Indian nations gathered in council to discuss treaties, Indian lands, and so forth. I told how the council generally ended with much feasting on dog meat; my Indian dad, Big Turkey, had told me as much. Then I suggested that Boots write to Cross—a friend of mine whose Indian paintings were the highest art—to see what a canvas to fit that place would cost. He took the address I got for him.

"Well, what else is on your mind?" he asked, as I rolled the drawing up and handed it over to him.

"I don't know, Boots, but I believe I can help you make that a better display than you'll find outside the Smithsonian Institute," I told him.

"That's great, old man," he said. "I'll spend anything to make it what you want it to be. You see, I figure on it as a rest place—sort of a den, where I can take my dogs and let them loll about on the Indian rugs, while I smoke and spend quiet evenings with those dogs. And it will be a place I can take friends into and not be a bit ashamed of it, either."

We tossed our cold smokes into a receptacle and went on back to our berths.

"Ain't that great? Wonderful! It's hard to imagine it—what you see when you come West after your Indians!" Boots enthused, as we stepped down out of the stage at Rainbow.

"What d'you mean?" I asked him.

"Just that—see them? Ain't it great?" and he pointed to a bunch of squaws and papooses that had squatted down on the sunny side of a wagon. Their many-hued shawls and Indian robes were strewn about them in a riot mixture that contrasted favorably with their vermillion-painted faces.

"Oh, that!" I finally made out what Boots was raving about. "That's about all you'll see around these diggings, from now on."

We walked inside the trading post, where Boots caught a glimpse of some big Sioux bucks standing about a Burnside stove and talking. Little Eagle looked up from under his broad-brimmed hat, then shaded his eyes with his hand to look the better against the light that poured through the several dingy windows. Others saw him, and they turned to see what he was watching.

"How, *Colo?*" he cried, and stalked toward me with outstretched hand.

I gave his hand the one shake—Indian fashion—and then the others came trouping up when Eagle had called my name, Wagalexa Conka, which is my Sioux name.

Boots Braden stood back and watched the reception the *chickpaws* gave me, and then I called him forward and introduced him. One or two of the boys seemed to remember his face, but could not place him.

"Well, Eagle, I guess we had better be getting busy—got to get back to the show in a week or so," I told him.

"Sure! Thems show rehearsals come quick. I dunno," he answered.

We walked outside where other Indians—old and young—came forward with many—"How, Colos," and inquiries about Pa-e-has-ka—which is Buffalo Bill's Sioux name.

I turned around to see where Boots was, but he had stayed in the trading post. It was getting well toward noon and I was hungry, so I went back to tell him that we had best eat, before I went over to see that agent. Inside the post Boots was looking at some old discarded raiment of the Indians that I, myself, remembered as having hung from those same crossbeams for years. He had made a purchase or two and was about to take them with him, when I objected.

At the agency hotel, we washed the trail dust from our faces and walked into the small dining room. I had come to the conclusion that the best thing for Boots' and my own welfare was to unload a few "don'ts" on him.

"Boots," I began, "I don't know just how you're going to take this little advice I am going to give, but I've got to spill it to you, anyway."

He straightened up and looked at me kind of puzzled.

"I noticed that you were buying some articles from the post. Take my tip and leave that dump alone. I know what I'm talking about. I've been coming here for years, now, and whenever a stranger hits that joint they just unload all that junk on them. It's junk, pure and simple, or the Indians would have it, the chances are. Not being inquisitive, what did you fork over for that stuff?"

"Ten dollars," he replied, and kind of blushed.

Recalling that I saw the clerk wrapping up a pair of worn-out leggings and a little trinket or two that had no value to the Indians, I smiled and said:

"Dang robbers!"

"Well, I didn't know," Boots explained.

"That's just it—you don't know, and they'll hook you every time. Another thing, Boots, if them dang Indians standing around there had spotted you coming out of that dump with that stuff under your arms you would be swamped with old squaws trying to hook some more of your money. There is really just one kind of stuff to buy. That's those nice beaded blankets, war bonnets—those long ones that have more than a hundred eagle feathers on each streamer—and scalp locks, if you happen to run on to any."

"Scalp locks!" Boots' face looked as if he was approaching some horrible calamity. "Scalp locks, did you say?"

"Sure!" I answered. "That is, if you are fortunate enough to get to see one, let alone buy it. They are as sacred as an old medicine pouch—and that is next to impossible to get hold of."

"Well, by golly, ole-timer, any time you see *me* with a dead man's foretop hanging around me, you can tell the whole world that old man Braden's son Boots has gone crazy. Not me! Ne-v-er!"

"Now, listen, old man," I wanted to wise Boots up on some Indian ways. "You had better let me do your purchasing for you—I can do it with a saving—a big saving, too. You see, when we get out on the reservation and are making all those camps, you'll see lots of things that will look mighty good in that bungalow of yours. There will be so many little things cropping up that you know nothing about at all, and that are real genuine articles—some of them handed down through generations; valuable stuff—but the *chickpaws* don't know it."

Boots was a real sport—he showed it right then and there. He reached across the table and shook my hand, and didn't say a word, except that from then on I was his official buyer.

Why, when we got away out on the plains, where the Indians are lucky if they get to see the agency once in a whole summer, we found conditions not so many jumps from the days of the Little Big Horn and Mountain Meadow massacres. We found, for instance, Hollow Horn Dog—a chief of the lesser tribe that fought with Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, and Gall when they annihilated General Custer and his gallant band. He was still puttering around a tepee his old squaw had set up close to the stone house the department had built for him. Hollow Horn Dog still painted his withered old face in vermilion, and smoked the peace pipe with all who came to see him, and wore around his shrieveled neck a string of small bones—strung in bead fashion and in the Indian belief, possessing some sort of a charm.

His hair was thin and streaked with gray, yet it was braided in the two plaits of his tribe; and standing out from the crown of his head was a single eagle feather. I shook hands with the old warrior, and was invited inside his tepee and given the place of honor—a seat opposite the opening of the lodge. I told the old man how well and hearty he looked—remembering that it was "bad medicine" indeed to even ask if he felt weak.

Boots took a seat by one of the boys who was riding across the big reserve with us. While we sat there chatting away in the sign talk, I was watching the little smoke that curled up through an opening in the apex of the tepee. I noticed the old poles that formed the frame of the lodge—there were several holes in them. I stood up to inspect and found them to be bullet holes.

Hollow Horn Dog noticed how I scrutinized those holes. When I sat down he looked at me with a dim-eyed stare, that seemed to be reading my mind. He raised his bony hand in the sign of peace.

"*Colo,*" he said—in his own language. "Many moons ago, when the big herds of buffalo roamed the plains, and the bear and antelope were plentiful—when I was young and could ride with any brave of the Ogalallas—there come upon the Ogalallas a man, Long Hair, and attacked our peaceful village as we fished and hunted on the banks of the Greasy Grass. There was many Indians—Cheyennes, Blackfeet, Brulé, and Utes—of all nations. And we were headed north to the hunting grounds to gather our winter meat. The riding soldiers fired into our camp. These tepee poles were in my big buffalo lodge. I have kept them in memory for my children—they mean the days when I was lifted from a brave to a chief and sat in the great council of the nations and smoked the peace pipe with the big chief Pizi."

By Long Hair he meant Custer; Greasy Grass was his name for the Little Big Horn, and Pizi was Indian for Gall.

"Oh!" chorused the boys, who heard the old story many times from their mother's knees.

"*Colo,*" went on Hollow Horn Dog, while we remained silent. "Here I give you evidence of my prowess—fruit from the war-path." And he hauled out of a blanket one scalp of a paleface, from which the hair was falling out. I felt of the dried thing and made the sign of peace. The old man reached for the pipe he had carried through the Wounded Knee uprising and filled it and lit it from a coal in the little fire that burned in the center of the tepee. He took a puff or two and blew it from him and watched the smoke as it scattered in the air, then he passed it on to me. I took a long pull or two at it and passed it on with my two hands to Boots.

He took it and put it to his lips and was about to take a puff when the pipe slipped from his hands and fell to the packed earth floor of the tepee and broke. Silently we sat there and waited. Boots started to pay for the pipe. I winked and shook my head at him. To Hollow Horn Dog and those young boys seated there, that broken peace pipe was "bad medicine"—an omen of ill luck. Then we rose to our feet and shook hands. I slipped a couple of coins into the old fellow's hands.

Outside, Boots asked if he could pay for the pipe. He also wanted to buy those old tepee poles. I told him he could get them if he could figure a way to steal them and get off the reserve without some one scalping him.

"Golly, Dean! But those are real relics—I'd give most anything to own them."

"Well, why not try and buy the scalp he showed us?" I asked, seeing that the man was bent on getting valuable stuff.

"Who, me? Buy that scalp?" And his eyes got round like saucers. "Dean, you don't think I want that dang thing hanging around in my house, do you?"

"Why, it would be a relic worth owning."

"Let me tell you, right now, there ain't going to be any human scalp in *my* house for me to look up at and say good night to, when I turn out the light. No, sir, boy, *Not me!*"

And that's about the way the Indian curios struck Boots. He would fall for some trivial article that had lots of cheap color in it and that he saw some squaw wearing, a whole lot quicker than he would for the things I picked out and paid for.

We found our time slipping away, and early one morning I called Boots and pointed out of the hotel window to where seventy of the *chickpaws* were waiting for me to show up and go on over to Pine Creek and take the train. They were singing farewell songs to the Indians who were left at home on the reservation, and they were having a Give-Away Dance. Boots sure enjoyed it and kept thinking to himself how great it would be to have some kind of a ceremony for the opening of his bungalow.

Late that fall when the maple leaves of "Ole" Virginia had turned to a golden yellow, and the crisp November air chilled the early mornings, the Buffalo Bill-Pawnee Bill shows came rolling into Richmond. It was the last show stand of the season, and that gave me and my Indians but little time to prepare for our leaving for the reservation. There were some tepees and suit cases to pack, and clothing to buy before we left.

When we reached the lot where the big canvas bellied as it was lifted with the breeze of early day, and heard the intermittant clack-clack of the sledging gangs driving stakes around the big top, I saw, over by the cook house, a hand that was raised high overhead and waving. The keener eyes of some of the Indian boys made out who it was, and, as we drew near, Boots Braden with a party of young bloods came up and grabbed me.

"Hello, Dean! How are you?" Then he turned around and beckoned the others to him and introduced them. He asked me to hustle and get ready and go downtown with them for breakfast.

"Man, I've got a heap of work to do before I can go, unless you can fix it with the colonel. He's liberal sometimes."

Across the lot at the farther end came a pair of pinto horses that drew the colonel's private carriage, and the old man, as we boys affectionately called Colonel Cody, was driving them. He wound in and out around the stake line; passed behind a big baggage wagon, and then finally drew up at the cook-house door and got out.

"How's things?" he said, and slapped me with his accustomed wallop on the back. "Show all get in?"

Then he recognized Boots, and shook hands with him and his friends and told me to take them in to breakfast.

"Colonel, I want this man to go downtown with *me* for breakfast," Boots said hopefully.

"Well, I don't see why he can't," the colonel told Boots, and then looked at me. "Run on, Dean—I won't have anything for us to work at till I see you again."

I gave my grip to a canvasman and told him to put it in the Red Wagon—meaning the business office—and jumped into the big seven-passenger car and was whirled off the lot and down through the city.

At the table, when we were served out food, Boots told me just how he had got everything finished in the bungalow—how all those Indian things I had bought for him seemed to fit right in place.

"And I got the picture two days ago," he enthused. "Golly, Dean, but it's a dinger. And it only cost me two thousand dollars, too."

"What picture do you mean—Cross' work?" I asked him.

"That's it—the Great Council. It's sure a weird thing to look at, the way I have it lighted up. Where the fire is burning in the painting, I asked Cross to leave that transparent; and right behind it—set in the wall—is a red electric light. The border is fringed with little blue lights—I want you to see it."

"I want to see it, but not to-day, I'm afraid," I said, remembering that I had to pack up my office stuff before taking my *chickpaws* on a shopping tour.

"Well, to-night after the show when you are finished with your work, I want you to come out to the house warming. Would you mind bringing some of your Indians with you? That will lend color to the thing."

"How many can you take care of?"

"As many as you want to bring—bring them all, and I will have lots of good eats for them and some presents to give them, too," he told me when we arose from the table.

"I am going on downtown, since you won't stay with me to-day. To-night at eleven o'clock I'll have the cars waiting for you and the boys," he said and let me out at the show lot.

The soft, mellow light of a rising moon was fast creeping across the stubble of a near-by cotton field. One could hear the soft voices of the negroes as they sang their quaint folk songs in a shack off from the side of the show lot—singing the songs of the old South before the war, when several cars swung in to the curb on the front of the lot. The driver of the first car came forward and touched his cap.

"Mr. Braden's cars at your service, sir."

"Fine! I'll be ready in a minute," I told him, and hurried to where I could shout to my Indians as they finished packing up their village at the back end of the grounds.

As I stood there amid the clatter-clatter of seat planks being put in wagons for the last time that season, I looked back toward the main entrance, and it did me good. There they came, Little Eagle, Red Thunder, Hollow Horn Dog, and the rest of the tribe, all togged out in the best they had. Gee, but I was proud of that bunch, and was truly glad that I had a chance to show them in their best clothes, instead of the people seeing them as I did every day with their bodies smeared over with the war paint of old.

I hurriedly loaded all my best types in the first car with me, and then distributed the remainder in the other automobiles—saving the squaws and papooses for the last machine in the line. When I told the driver of the first car that I wanted the machines kept close together he walked back and told the others.

Down the main street, to a corner where the driver turned toward Boots' bungalow, whirled the caravan of red men—the feathers on their war bonnets whipping the breeze, and every Indian chanting in a low tone their "Omaha" song. But I stopped that before we got to Boots' place.

When we drove up the long, winding driveway that led under some trees where other machines were parked, not a soul heard us coming. We got out of the cars and assembled in one large circle with the tom-tom beaters in the center. Then Hollow Horn Dog lifted his old cracked voice in starting a song of greeting.

Out of the bungalow the guests came on the run to see what caused that bedlam. Women, who were first to reach the large porch nearly collapsed when they saw the painted denizens of the plains standing there in a circle with their feathered heads shaking in perfect time with the beat of the tom-toms.

Boots Braden was just explaining to a friend the merits of the Cross canvas, which

was in the room Out There, under lock and key, when he saw the guests at the other end of the hall scrambling toward the door. He listened, and then it dawned on him. He burst through the crowd to where we were singing—I was chanting as loud as any old squaw in the tribe, because Indian music awakens the savage in me.

"Dean, I'm sure glad you got here——"

I didn't want to hear him just then. I was singing with my *chickpaws,* and perhaps you don't know it, but it is uncommon for Indians to permit a paleface to sing with them the songs they have learned from their mothers—songs that have come down through the ages, as counted by the moons. But when we finished, I turned around.

"Well, what do you say?" I asked him, wanting to know where we were to put the boys, and just what the program for the evening was.

"I want you to bring them around to the side door to enter the room. Then you can place them so as to make a nice picture for the guests when we let them in. You see, Dean, it's been under lock and key ever since I got through fixing it up."

When he told the people to amuse themselves as best they could at pool and music, I took my *chickpaws* and beat it around to the side door and waited until Boots opened it for us.

The Indians walked in and started loud exclamations about its beauty—but I quickly called silence, and started grouping them about the room. I took Eagle and another boy with a young squaw, and squatted them on a large Navaho rug, as though conversing in sign talk. Hollow Horn Dog and the older men and their squaws took a place in a semicircle around the Cross canvas, as though they were a part of the Great Council painting, and were just waiting for the powwow to cease and partake of the dog feast that would be served. Over in the corner—one of those little nooks in a room which invite chummy conversation—which was lighted by a pale-blue light, Joseph Pretty Wolf and Annie Iron Shell stood under a blanket protraying the lovers of the Indian village. All in all the room with its wonderful decorations and my real Sioux Indians grouped about it, was something to admire.

When I told Boots all was ready, he went out by another door and around to where the crowd was chatting, and told them about not talking to the Indians—they were simply a living picture—until I gave the signal and the tableau was broken. Then they could talk with them, if they wished.

The crowd strolled around from one exhibit to another. They laughed heartily at the shy Indian lovers, and admired Mrs. Pretty Beaver as she sat squatted there with a little papoose slung across her shoulders and beaded away on a scalp-lock shirt of her brave. But when they came over to the Great Council and saw that group of aged warriors squatted in a circle, with the peace pipe going its rounds, and Boots pulled back the curtain and turned on the lighting effects of the massive frame, they were simply amazed.

Right then something happened that I had not planned for. Hollow Horn Dog raised his feeble voice in a chant that I had not heard for years. The effect of those Indians who started singing, and that almost living picture, made it so real that Dave Two Strikes jumped high in the air and let out a war whoop—he was so enthused by the spirit speaking out of the past about the warpath. By golly, that just scared them society folks stiff. They scrambled and beat it for the doors, until I quieted them by assuring that it was only a dance that was to be pulled off.

The Indians whooped again and again, then there came a howling of dogs and a scratching at the door. I looked at Boots, and he, of course, understood what it was, and immediately opened it for his valuable pets to see the sight. The dogs jumped through the door and then took a stand—the sight was almost too much for their civilized eyes. It was all strange to them. They growled and whined as my Indians whooped and yelled. It was a reminder to my *chickpaws.* I saw them all casting admiring glances toward the dogs. I though it was just a matter of admiring those beautiful thoroughbreds—setters of the purest Irish strain, and Boots almost forgot his Indian exhibit in his fondling of his pets.

After the guests had looked over the room Out There, and the Indians had walked around admiring everything, a servant announced dinner. He set a table for the *chickpaws* off by themselves, while Boots' friends hob-nobbed among themselves at another board.

Later on Hollow Horn Dog rose from his seat, and lifted his right hand, and looked

around at the others and started talking. As he stood there in his great blanket and his war bonnet training to his feet, he was a wonderful picture. I was proud of the old fellow. He told Boots in Sioux just how great his tepee was, and how well he and his boys liked the spirit picture of the Great Council. They, too, would have a council soon—perhaps while on their way back to Rainbow—and they would remember him while they feasted.

Then he bade all farewell. Of course, it pleased Boots to know that the Indians would carry a memory of him back home to the reservation. He was glad that he had pleased their savage tastes with the general color scheme of his home. He thanked them all through me and, of course, I told the Indians that Boots Braden had a good heart, and that with the Ogalallas he was always smoking the peace pipe.

When the Indians had finished we went outside to smoke, while the guests remained at their table talking of what interested them most, the social whirl of Richmond.

Outside the bungalow and behind that structure, Boots had built a kennel for his dogs. There is where my Indians headed for, as they strolled unconcernedly about the grounds under a starlighted sky.

"*Tocté Shunkaka?*" I heard one ask another, of the animals as he peered into the darkened corner of the yard. But I did not think anything of that.

Time went on, and I had almost forgotten my Indians. They should be at the depot for the five-o'clock morning train that was to carry us back to the West and Rainbow. I looked at my watch—my time was getting short. I excused myself and went outside to look my Indians up, but the drivers of the cars had not seen them for some time, they said. I hunted around the grounds for a while and then telephoned the railroad station.

"Yes," he said, "there is a big bunch of Indians here waiting for something."

"All right—I'll be right down. Get them into the cars I ordered. I have a blanket ticket covering the entire movement," I ordered, and hung up the receiver, as Boots got out his racing car to take me to the train.

At the depot I made a hasty inspection of the train for water, and took a look at the baggage car where the boys were storing their little bundles, and then let the Indians bunk down where they wanted to, and went back and locked the end door that led out through a diner to the forward end of the train. I thought my boys wanted to sleep, and I knew I did.

A lurch of the train the next night woke me up, and I scrambled out into the aisle to see what was wrong. Just an emergency signal, a trainman told me. But I thought I would have a smoke before going back to my berth. In the dimly lighted car, I heard some squaws, with their berth lights burning, chattering away and working behind the curtains. But I did not think anything about it, but went on back to my own berth.

The train was getting well on its way to the border of the State the next day, and I was finishing a cigarette and watching the cornfields and their harvesters whirl by in a cloud of draft dust, when something caught my eye. It was a rolling mass of stuff that had been thrown from our train. Then a little later I saw another and another. That set me thinking and the only thing I could figure was that it must have been thrown from the diner.

At Rainbow Reservation we were received with the sincere welcome that only the Indians can give to the boys who had spent over thirty weeks with the big shows of Pa-e-has-ka. They were at the train in Pine Creek and escorted us to the agency.

There was much powwowing and heap smoke and big talk, as an Indian would tell you, and then the day dwindled out and night slowly fell about us. The night meant more ceremony. Several dances and a council were to be given by the Indians, with the permission of the agent. There were several members of the Sioux from Standing Rock and Rosebud Agencies to attend the council, and they carried with them their paints and feathers for the gala evening.

When Eagle and Hollow Horn Dog came for me in a wagon, I was ready. We drove out across Mission Flats to where the Omaha Cheepee stood. Already there were little fires of the camping tribe that shot straight up in the chill of the night. Off from these fires, squaws had raised some tepees for the bucks to dress in.

When we went inside the building, the drummers were gathered around a large drum, and were starting to tune up. In the center of the room Ochilla Was-té, the medi-

cine man, was performing rites over a large kettle that was steaming from a red-hot open fire. There was no mistaking there would be some feast that night.

The camp orator went to the door and cried out to the Indians in a voice that reached to the farther end of the village. When he finished speaking to the people, they answered with a chorus of "Ohs," which means yes.

If you could have been there, you would have seen Indians, old and tottering, bedecked in the paint and feathers of warrior days, come trouping into that Omaha Cheepee out of the chill—shivering, but enthusiastic. They were followed by all the younger bucks and boys, with the squaws bringing up the tail end.

They took on an Omaha dance just to warm up. Then the different chiefs—the Indians still retain their chiefs—rose from their places and gave welcome to the returning wanderers.

But what I want to tell you about was the council and dance—and the feast.

Hollow Horn Dog got slowly to his feet, and drew his beaded squaw-cloth blanket around him and raised his right hand in the air, and spoke. He called for the six leading chiefs of the Ogalallas who came forward for the council.

After they had talked of the things that interest only themselves, the old chiefs gathered around the cooking fire. They all raised their lances straight in the air over their heads. At a signal from Hollow Horn Dog, the next rank of braves took a circling position nearest the chiefs, and so on down to the squaws, who had to be content to stand back, away from the dancers, and chant.

Those old chiefs would make a cautious advance up to the fire, with their lances poised for attack. Then they would retire —dancing in perfect step the while. After several times of that sort of stuff, they finally reached the fire; and taking their lances, pricked what I saw to be cooking dog meat. To them that was "good medicine." I sat there and looked on, and deep down inside I felt a sympathy for my Indians. Possibly very few have ever given thought to when or how those wild, weird ceremonies had originated. Nor do many—even those few palefaces who rule the reservation and live on the very blood of the red man—seem to realize just what centuries of that sort of thing meant to the Indians. To me and my savage ways it was as solemn as a high mass. It was much older perhaps.

When they had finally finished the dancing, and the ceremony of the feast was to take place, those cooked dogs were distributed around the room by young braves. I, of course, being an adopted son of the tribe, was offered a piece, and I took it and I ate it. That is why I stand so well among my people, the Indians. Because their ceremonies and rites are my ceremonies and rites.

When we finished eating our allotment of the dog, the squaws who had secured the meat and had prepared it brought the pelts for inspection. They spread them in front of the old chiefs, and when they stood back out of the way, I saw there on the hard earthen floor the fresh hides of six beautiful setters.

I did some rapid-fire thinking right then, and among my thoughts was Boots Braden's dogs that I had just finished eating with my *chickpaws*. Old Hollow Horn Dogs' words were true—they did have a council and a feast, and I wondered if they did think of Boots and his tepee.

In the back part of my own mind I was thinking of Boots when he broke the peace pipe—which was to me and my Indians "bad medicine"—an omen of ill luck!

AN UNDESERVED TRIBUTE!

A THEATRICAL producer from Australia was being shown through a New York motion-picture studio. His guide was the owner of the plant, one of the biggest men in this country's movie business.

"You don't live in New York, is it?" the millionaire guide asked his guest.

"No," the foreigner answered. "My home's in Australia. I got here six weeks ago, and this is my first visit to your country."

"Only six weeks in New York, is it?" exclaimed the celluloid king in undisguised admiration. "Truly great! Here by us only six weeks and you speak English perfectly!"

Lost Wagons

By Dane Coolidge

Author of "Maverick Basin," "Fate and the Fighter," Etc.

(A Four-Part Story—Part IV.)

CHAPTER XXI.

SQUARE AS A DOLLAR.

"TAKE a tip from me," whispered Tucker in Shorty's ear, when they were back with their beans and champagne, "and git rid of that stuff, before you're pinched."

"Pinched!" cackled Shorty, and Tucker jabbed him in the ribs.

"Yes," he said, "for stealing it from Lost Wagons. Did you think you could beat old Ketcherside?"

"Ketcherside, nahthin'!" whispered Shorty hoarsely. "I got this from me mine, the long-lost Breifogle——"

"That's right," counseled Tucker, "stay with it—don't weaken—but for cripe's sake, can't you bury that gold?"

"Nah, they're watching me," answered Shorty, after thinking the matter over. "You take it," and he passed the sack under the table.

"Here's some money," returned Tucker and slipped out the back way, for there were those in front that he feared. It was still early in the morning and everything was at cross purposes, and the stampeders had not returned from Lost Wagons. But sooner or later, when Gold Trails got together, he knew they were due to gang him. Since men follow their own interests it was inevitable that they should hound him until he confessed to robbing Lost Wagons; for every man in Gold Trails who could beg, borrow, or steal the money had bought Lost Wagons—on a margin. And it was up to ten-ten on the mere, unsubstantiated rumor that he and Shorty had been robbing the mine. Would they listen to his story of a mysterious lost mine, from which he dug out the pure gold? Only so long as Lost Wagons stayed up around ten-ten, and when it began to drop—the debacle!

Tucker could imagine that drink-mad crowd, watching their winnings being swept away for lack of a mere word from him; and though that word would make him an ore thief and a self-confessed criminal, he knew they would try to force it from his lips. Yes, and compel him to give up the gold. Otherwise, all the money that they had begged, borrowed, or stolen would be swept into some stockbroker's till; and their glorious winnings, piled up so miraculously, would disappear as they had once before. It was Ketcherside who was robbing them, but he was respectable, above both their anger and the law; but with Tucker Edwards it was different, he was one of their kind, and, of course, he had stolen the ore.

Yet, despite this gambling madness which had seized them again, and which Tucker had never dreamed would recur, he was still grimly determined to play his hand out and to fight Ira N. Ketcherside to a finish. Was it any more of a crime to make away with Ketcherside's gold than it was to sell Lost Wagons at ten dollars? Then why be a petty thief, a petty-larceny ore robber—why not sit in at the big game and play 'em high? Why not go up against Ketcherside with his ill-gotten millions and make him lay his cards on the table? For when Ketcherside's hand was tabled it would be a bob-tailed flush—unless he could show some real ore!

Tucker dodged down a back alley and up over a low ridge and down a little side cañon to the corral; and while he was saddling up his mule he rooted a hole in the manger waste and dumped Shorty's gold out of sight. Then he filled the sack with rocks and, mounting in hot haste, went galloping away down the wash. He turned off up a gulch and chucked the sack into a rat's nest that was built in a lime-stone cave; and then, still riding hard, he rimmed out over the mesa and came into town from the west. They were searching for him, by that

time, and as he went in to see Ketcherside he noticed that Lost Wagons had dropped to nine.

It was Lew, the megaphone man, who had spied him on the hilltops and bawled the fierce summons to see Ketcherside; but Tucker was ready, and he entered like a bridegroom, for the ride had stirred his blood. He had breasted the cold wind and felt the wild thrill of freedom that comes from a struggle with the elements; he knew the world was his if he but matched his courage against theirs, his nerve against Ketcherside's cunning. For he held the lucky card, the joker of the pack, and four good aces besides; and all he needed was a show-down, aboveboard, with no phony decks under the table. Yes, with his gold and Shorty's he had Lost Wagons at his mercy—and Gold Trails would go broke anyway. Why should he worry about Bullfrog Smith and the money-mad rabble who had pyramided their winnings on the stock? Hadn't he warned them repeatedly, until they had laughed him to scorn; hadn't he warned them to sell while they could? Well, let them go broke then—they had it coming to them.

He strode into the front office and up to the wicket, where the successor of Sinjin received him coldly; and then, all smiling, her golden hair an aureole, Julia Cleghorn came hurrying to greet him.

"Oh, I'm so glad!" she cried. "Some of them claimed you had run away, and Shorty thought you had stolen his gold. He's right in there now—won't you wait in my room here, while I see if they're ready to receive you?"

He followed her dumbly and looked about the dainty room, so like her and yet so unlike; for the desk was simple and orderly but the furnishings were ornate, almost suggestive of vulgar display. Ketcherside had reproduced, in a way, the alcove in San Francisco, where she had burst upon Tucker's vision like a goddess; but the wood used here was cheap and the taste a trifle crude, as was to be expected, out there on the desert. But it was not that that displeased him, it was the pretentiousness of it all, as if Lost Wagons could ever justify such extravagance. Tucker knew it could not, that it never could, not even if they dug out pure gold; for how could a mine be worth twenty million dollars when it had never shipped a pound of real ore? No, it was false—and Ketcherside was false.

He was roused from his revery by a quick step down the hall, and when Julia whisked in he smiled. She was so young, so buoyant, so full of girlish strength, and yet—his smile fell away. She had given his present to Ketcherside.

"Oh, you didn't steal it, did you?" she demanded reproachfully, and he pounded cautiously along the wall with his fist.

"Any of those listening machines in here?" he inquired mysteriously. "You know—like you had in San Francisco."

"Why, no," she protested with a puzzled frown. "What do you mean? I don't understand."

"Why, don't you remember," and his smile crept back, "that time when I first met you, in San Francisco? And old Ketcherside listened in while you were stringing me about my mine, and finally called me back and bought it? Those were the great days, eh? Say, you looked good to me then, but——"

"Oh, don't I now?" she cried. Then, when he stood silent, she bowed her head and gazed up at him sorrowfully.

"Aren't you going to forgive me?" she asked. "I really didn't mean to, only—I was so proud to have you succeed. And, of course, when I showed it to him and said it came from your new mine, why, he—he told me he would keep it. But you didn't steal that nugget, did you?"

He tapped the wall craftily, then beckoned her nearer and whispered into her ear.

"No. I bought it from Horse-shootum. So I'll forgive you."

"Oh, will you?" she laughed and brushed her hair against his cheek, at which he caught his breath and looked wild.

"What's going on inside?" he inquired at last, jerking his head toward Ketcherside's office, and a change came over her face. Once more she was the confidential secretary.

"They're having a committee meeting," she said. "Something to do with the mine. And, oh, yes, Mr. Swingle is there."

"Giving him the third degree, eh?" nodded Tucker knowingly. "Say, have you sold that stock of yours yet?"

"No," she answered, almost defiantly.

"It's gone up," he suggested, "*and*—it's going down," he added. "What's the matter, won't the old boy let you?"

"Oh, yes," she said, "I can sell it if I want to, but—it wouldn't be right, at this time."

"He's a lovable old feller, ain't he?" observed Tucker sarcastically. "It's an inspiration, just to be near him. And so kind and considerate, lets you in on every little thing. Only, of course, you mustn't sell your stock. No, that woudn't be right—oh, gee, no!"

"You're jealous," she charged with a faint, fleeting smile; and he drooped his eyes and looked wise.

"Sure," he said, "but don't you never think I'm out of my head, or anything. I'm wise to that old 'pothecator—he's got you bought, heart and soul. You'd ditch me in a minute, if he asked you to."

"What do you mean?" she asked, a startled look in her eyes, but he closed his mouth down grimly.

"You know," he replied, "so don't ask any leading questions. Ain't you working for Ira N. Ketcherside?"

"Why, certainly," she began, "but I don't see what difference——"

"Well, I do," he broke in. "Suppose he asked you what I'd told you—wouldn't you feel it was your duty to tell him?"

"Why, er—no!" she said. "That is, unless it was something——"

"Well, what?" he demanded accusingly.

"Well, something about the mine or——"

"Ah!" he exclaimed, and raised his eyebrows significantly. "Glad you spoke. I'll keep my trap shut. You're a charming young creature, but sometimes the thought comes to me—well, *you* know; you're taking his money. And if you take a man's money—well, he owns you, that's all. If you were working for *me,* now, I'd trust you."

"Oh, thank you!" she bowed with elaborate sarcasm. "You're really quite cynical this morning. Or, perhaps, what they say is really true and you did get your gold from our mine."

"Yes, I bet ye," he returned with a curl of the lip. "That's the last place I'd go to look for gold. Why, old Ketcherside himself admitted to me yesterday that you haven't got enough for specimens. He's a great guy, old Side-o'-bacon; he's 'squvare as a toller,' as the Dutchman says, down at the corral."

"Well, he *is* square," she defended, "and if the mine is so poor, perhaps you'll tell me why the stock is worth nine dollars?"

"No, you tell *me,*" he said. "But I'll tell you one thing first—it hasn't produced a dollar, up to date."

"Well, it has!" she contradicted. "It's produced hundreds of thousands of dollars, but some one has stolen all the gold. You needn't look so cynical—and if what they say is true, you stole that gold yourself!"

"Me!" shrilled Tucker in mock surprise. "Who was it had the nerve to say that?"

"It was Mr. Ketcherside himself—they all of them said it—and Shorty Swingle has confessed!"

"Confessed to what?" inquired Tucker, still with his provocative smile, and Julia forgot she was a secretary. Or rather, she forgot that it was her duty to get information and never, under any circumstances, to give it.

"He's confessed that he stole his gold!" she cried triumphantly. "And his nuggets are just like yours."

"You don't say!" he mocked. "Shorty Swingle a thief? Why, somehow it doesn't seem possible!"

He laughed silently, waving her away with one hand; and she returned to the charge, her eyes blazing.

"You seem to think," she said, "that there's something funny about stealing ore, and going off and claiming it's from some mine; but you wait till Mr. Ketcherside has attended to Shorty and——"

"He'll take a fall out of me, eh?" suggested Tucker. "Well, now listen, Little Bright Eyes, if such be your name. Mr. Ketcherside won't do anything of the kind. He's trying to *buy* my ore, so he can salt your old mine, before the corporation commission gets after him."

"I don't believe it!" she declared flatly, and as he met her gaze he saw the tears start to her eyes.

"Naturally," he observed, "or you wouldn't be working for him—and you wouldn't be holding that stock. You'd tear out of here and sell it, and get out of town before Lost Wagons went to—nothing. But I'm telling you, savvy, and I want you to remember it—Lost Wagons is going to *bust.* It's going to slump, the way it did once before, only this time it's never going to stop; and when they go to the mine the commission is going to find that they *never have produced a ton of ore.* Do you think that will land him in jail?"

"Why—why, I don't believe it," she cried, half-heartedly. "And, besides, they're going to get back the gold!"

"Will that make the mine worth eighteen

million dollars—that one little sack of swiped ore? No, you're working for a crook!" he ended. "Some day you'll remember my words."

"I think you're horrid!" she burst out indignantly, and hurried off to answer the buzzer. "Mr. Ketcherside will see you," she announced.

CHAPTER XXII.

A PRAISEWORTHY AMBITION.

Tucker went in to see Ketcherside with the glad light of battle in his eyes, for he had reduced Little Bright Eyes to tears. She had strung him along, up to a certain point, and then he had discovered her deception; and from that time on he had made her ears burn by the way he talked about Ketcherside. He had made her see, beyond the shadow of a doubt, just what kind of a man she was working for; and now he was going in to tell the boss himself what one honest young mining man thought of him. And if anything was said about his stealing their ore he was going to start in and talk corporation commission until they implored him to stop.

There was quite an aggregation in Mr. Ketcherside's private office, including Personality Plus and Sinjin; but the man who caught his eye was a bulldog-jawed stranger who had "detective" written large, all over him. He had flat feet, of course, and a bulge under his coat, and an intent, animal watchfulness in his eyes; and with it all the ponderous surety of one who is armed with the law. Tucker glanced at him a moment, then at Shorty and Ketcherside, and reached back and tried the door.

"Oh, ain't locked this time, eh?" he commented, and Ketcherside glared, for he had been about to speak.

"Mr. Edwards," he began after a minute of tense silence, "this is not the time for levity. And please understand right now that we mean business about this ore theft—Mr. Swingle here has confessed to his share."

"Oh, confessed, eh?" observed Tucker and stood waiting. "Well," he said at last, "what about it?"

"I want that gold back!" stuttered Shorty, suddenly roused by the detective, and Tucker grinned indulgently.

"W'y sure, Shorty," he said. "All you have to do is ask for it. Come on, we'll go get it, right now."

"Just a moment," interposed Ketcherside rising up apprehensively. "Here, stop them—what the devil's the matter with you?" The detective leaped up and put his bulk against the door, and Tucker looked back inquiringly. "Mr. Edwards!" burst out Ketcherside, controlling his nerves with an effort, "this farce has gone far enough. You may think, young man, that you are playing a smooth part; but the gentleman behind you is a detective!"

"I knew that," replied Tucker, regarding him appraisingly. "Well, what do you want? Speak up!"

"We want that gold that you stole from us!" trumpeted Ketcherside. "And if you don't restore it I shall have you arrested!"

"Oh, you don't say!" returned Tucker aggressively. "So you're trying the strong-arm stuff? Well, what has Shorty Swingle got to do with me? Did he say I stole any ore?"

"Aw, now Tucker," laughed Shorty, who was still under the influence of the champagne he had imbibed with his breakfast, "you know very well we talked it all over. *You* know—about looking for the nuggets?"

"W'y, sure," agreed Tucker, "and what did I say about it, after you'd talked me blind all night? Didn't I tell you I wouldn't think of such petty-larceny methods? And didn't I leave the same day, and go south?"

"Well—yes, you did," admitted Shorty, who was painfully honest while drunk, "but you know, now, Tuck——"

"I don't know anything!" burst out Tuck oratorically. "Now go ahead and arrest me!" He glanced from the detective to Sinjin and Ketcherside and showed all his teeth in a grin. "You're a prize bunch of holdups!" he went on scathingly as no one made a move to detain him. "You just wait till that corporation commission hits town, and *then* I'll do some talking. I'll tell 'em, in the first place, you've sunk a three-compartment shaft fifty feet to one side of your vein; and I'll tell 'em in the second place, you're afraid to crosscut for fear the whole ore body has pinched out. You'll look sick, Mr. Ketcherside, when I tell 'em how you threatened me when I came in to see you yesterday; and then turned around and wanted to buy my ore so you'd have something to salt the Lost Wagons with."

"That will do, young man!" threatened Ketcherside dangerously, "I'll not allow this to go any further."

"Well, all right then!" answered Tucker,

"call your private detective off and let me go and get Shorty's gold. I'm not looking for any trouble, but if you go to crowding *me*——"

"Aw, leave him alone!" spoke up Shorty magnanimously, "he don't know nothing about this gold. I jest picked it up myself, while I was prospecting up the wash and happened——"

"Are they paying you anything for it?" broke in Tucker abruptly.

"W'y—*no!*" howled Shorty, suddenly awaking to the injustice of it, "but they will, by grab, before they're through with it. They can't arrest me *here* for what I done over in California. I ain't as drunk as they think."

"Why, sure not!" reassured Tucker, "Gold Trails is in Nevada. Come on, let's go out and get a drink."

"I'm with ye!" cheered Shorty making a charge for the door, but the detective turned him back.

"Just a minute," he said, "Mr. Ketcherside wants to speak with you. We ain't handling this right," he observed to Mr. Ketcherside, and that magnate all but annihilated him with a look.

"Kindly step outside the door," he replied peremptorily. "And I will excuse you gentlemen, also," he added, indicating all but Tucker and Shorty.

He bowed and Pete Hogaboom, St. John and the rest filed moodily out into the hall They had come there as a committee of representative citizens, personally interested in the success of Lost Wagons; but the news which they had gathered from the rantings of Tucker Edwards had cast a subtle gloom over the party. Not only had he denied any knowledge of the ore thefts, but he had openly defied Ketcherside, and made such sinister threats that they feared what he said might come true. And if it ever did, if the corporation commission of California ever sent out a man to investigate; then, right or wrong, Lost Wagons as a stock would go down to abysmal depths. That was the way people's minds worked—they jumped at conclusions, without asking if the charges were true.

But there was one man still who stood between Lost Wagons and the catastrophe which so imminently threatened; and Ira N. Ketcherside had fought many a last hope, and won by his iron will. All the elements that would go to make Lost Wagons a great success were there, within reach of his hand; but the case, as the detective said, had been badly mishandled, and now even Shorty had recanted.

The mere presence of Tucker Edwards, and his bold defiance, had roused a kindred spirit in Shorty; until now with drunken fatuousness he was insisting upon a payment before he would restore the stolen gold. And the weakness of Ketcherside's case had been further exposed when Tucker had challenged them to arrest him; for how was it possible to swear out a warrant, when the offense had been committed in California? No, the bluff had been called, for the arrests were impossible without at least a week's delay; and a week would see Lost Wagons a wreck on the stock market, unless something was done, and done quick.

"Well, gentlemen," began Ketcherside, after looking them over dourly, "this is something entirely new in my experience. I have always made it a principle never to compound a felony or yield to the least hint of blackmail; but circumstances are such that, to protect my many stockholders, I must make you an offer for your gold."

"Who're you talking' to?" demanded Tucker, after a fulminating silence. "Do you think I'm here to sell gold? Well, guess again, mister; my gold is all hid, and it's going to stay hid, understand?"

"How about you, Mr. Swingle?" inquired Ketcherside evenly. "And let me remind you that you've already confessed——"

"I was drunk!" protested Shorty. And then, after studying on it: "I'll take ten thousand dollars," he said.

"How much gold have you?" inquired Ketcherside suavely, but Shorty had something else on his mind.

"I ain't no criminal," he declared stubbornly, "I didn't steal that gold; I jest picked it up on your ground."

"Yes, that's all right," soothed Ketcherside. "We just want it back, with a statement as to where you got it."

"Well—sold then!" pronounced Shorty.

After smiling at him cryptically Ketcherside sat down and wrote out a check.

"Where'd you bury it?" asked Shorty, and Tucker drew him aside while he whispered the directions in his ear.

"And remember," he ended, "get that check cashed first. If you don't he'll stop the payment."

"'Get it cashed *first,*' he says!" sung

out Shorty cheerily, and went off to dig up his gold.

"And now you, sir," went on Ketcherside, when he was alone with Tucker Edwards. "How much do you want? Be frank."

"Well, I'll be frank," returned Tucker. "There's only one thing I want and that is to be left strictly alone. I know you think I'm trying to hold you up and get some fancy price for my ore; but the fact is, Mr. Ketcherside, I've got plenty of money already, and I know where to get plenty more. So if you'll leave me alone and call off your detectives, I'll agree to lay off on Lost Wagons."

"Do you really mean to claim?" demanded Ketcherside incredulously, "that you have discovered another mine, as rich or richer than Lost Wagons?"

"Well, why not?" parried Tucker. "Lost Wagons isn't so rich. I sold it to you for ten thousand dollars. But this mine I've got now—well, you saw the ore; it's practically the same as pure gold."

"And do you actually claim that this gold you brought in is the product of another mine you've discovered?"

"That's the dope," nodded Tucker, "and if I'm ever crowded to it, I can show you the ore in place."

"This ore?" questioned Ketcherside, producing one of the nuggets that Tucker had traded in at the store, and Tucker jerked his head.

"Well, well!" murmured Ketcherside, and fell to pacing up and down. "Incredible!" he exclaimed. "Incredible!"

He paused and his eyes suddenly flashed with fire.

"How much do you want for your mine?" he asked.

"I won't sell it," returned Tucker. "Don't like the way you've treated me, nor the way you've stocked Lost Wagons. I figure on keeping this myself."

"Put a price on it!" urged Ketcherside. "I'll be generous with you, Edwards. Come, come, now; why can't we be friends?"

"Nope," refused Tucker, "I don't want your money. All I want is to be left strictly alone."

Ketcherside turned and looked at him, and his eyes seemed to bore him through.

"But why?" he persisted. "What's your reason?"

"Because," flared up Tucker, "if I'd sell my mine to you, you'd turn around and stock it for forty million. And then you'd peddle the stock to a bunch of janitors and stenographers and take every dollar they had. I may be a holdup, but I'm not as low as that—I'm out for *your* money, not theirs!"

"Oh, I see!" rapped out Ketcherside. "I understand now, at last. What you're doing is a matter of personal spite. And speaking of stenographers——"

"No, *not* speaking of stenographers!" cut in Tucker savagely. "You're right, I'm out to get you. To hell with the stenographers—if they had any sense they'd know you were a crook at first sight. Let 'em lose their danged money, it's nothing to me; what I want is to nick you, good!"

"That's a praiseworthy ambition," observed Ketcherside dryly. "There are others who have tried it before, but I hardly expected to find one out here. Very well, Mr. Edwards, we understand each other perfectly; I wish you a very good day."

"Yes, the same to you," hissed Tucker between his teeth and called him by his right name going out.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DON'T BET.

The announcement of Shorty's confession, the exhibition of the stolen gold, and the instantaneous response of the stock market, put Gold Trails in a holiday mood. There was a tremendous rush of outsiders, whisky and wine flowed like water, Lost Wagons went well above ten dollars; and Shorty Swingle, still giving his bean suppers, was easily the most popular man in camp. It was not left in the heart of any citizen of Gold Trails to blame Shorty for his naïve rascality; but Tucker Edwards walked softly, listening for something to drop, for he had not confessed.

Not in words, that is—not in so many words; but in a moment of excitement he had admitted to Ketcherside that he was out to put a nick in his roll. And how could he do that unless he had something that Ketcherside wanted, something that he really needed in his business—to wit, the Lost Wagons gold? Ketcherside had succeeded, it seemed to Tucker, far above his just deserts, far above what could reasonably be hoped for; but he was out for a bigger killing, for the clean-up of a lifetime in this, his first venture in mining. He had held up Lost Wagons by his unlimited buying orders un-

til it was firmly established around ten dollars; and in Gold Trails at least he had taken steps to protect the market by compelling wider margins in the selling; but there the stock hung, and unless something big was sprung it would waver and fall by its own weight.

The gold which Shorty had stolen was placed on exhibition, along with an assay from a great smelting plant; and according to that assay it was the richest gold ore which had ever been produced in the West. It ran over ninety per cent gold and, with the silver which it contained, was worth four hundred and forty-seven thousand eight hundred and sixty-three dollars and seventy-two cents a ton. Pure gold itself, one thousand fine, was worth only a slight per cent more. And this wonderful ore had been found right on the surface, where it could be picked up by a passing prospector. What treasure houses of wealth, beyond the wildest dreams of avarice, must be locked in the depths of Lost Wagons!

It read good, very good, and as the publicity went out there was a steady outside demand for the stock; but how long would it be before the public would begin to clamor and ask why that treasure house was not tapped? And if it was not tapped, and the new strike speedily announced, another of those strange panics which seize upon timorous speculators would sweep the whole card house to the ground. No, Tucker had something that Ketcherside must buy, and he sensed men following him everywhere.

It was the evening of the third day, and he was still walking warily, looking back at every dark shadow, when from the door of the St. Francis a woman stepped out, coming rapidly up behind him. Tucker gave her the sidewalk, though he knew who it was, and she passed on up the street without looking at him. Even Julia Cleghorn was a person to be feared, in these days when the whole camp was against him; but as she did not return his glance Tucker quickened his pace and strode up boldly beside her.

His nerves were on edge, his whole being cried for action; but, like her, they were all his friends. There was no man to oppose him, to start something rough or hint that he had robbed Lost Wagons; they were all his friends, though with a look in their eyes that betrayed their fawning hate. They were organized to trap him, to back him into some corner where they could make him give up his secret; and, knowing that they would follow him if he took to the open, he was staying in town for safety. But here was one who, though she was in league with the enemy, used no weapons but her gentleness and wit. And she had passed him without a sign.

"Don't shoot!" he said, as he came up beside her, and she glanced behind them quickly.

"Don't bet!" she answered, speaking as lightly as he had, and hurried on up the street.

"What the devil!" muttered Tucker as he stood gazing after her, and turned abruptly back. A man close behind him seemed to suddenly remember something important which caused him to turn back, too; and as he passed Tin Can Alley he swung off into the darkness, leaving Tucker to ponder on this oracle.

"Don't bet, eh?" he grumbled. "Well, who wants to bet? Who's made any cracks about betting? I wish some poor fool would bet I'm crazy—I'd take him up, just to find out for sure. Don't bet, eh?"

Since the strike at Lost Wagons a new element had appeared in Gold Trails, hard-faced men in loud suits and glittering diamonds, attracted by the lure of easy money. Some were gamblers seeking their proper prey; but the majority were just there without any obvious occupation, mixing in with the mining-camp crowd. They got together in the saloons or around the gaming tables, talking the language of the race track or the underworld; and the Happy Days in particular, being the largest saloon, was never without its quota. They played high at roulette and faro, winning or losing without a word, and drank at the bar by themselves; but always with an aloofness, an ill-concealed disdain for the men who worked with their hands.

Tucker strolled about among them, that night, going from saloon to crowded saloon and watching the play and the crowd; until at last he drifted back to the old Happy Days, where Bullfrog immediately hailed him.

"Say," he said, beckoning him off to one side, "have you ever been in New York? Well, there was a young feller in here that claims he used to know you there—says you used to deal faro, at Canfield's."

"He's a liar," declared Tucker; "never

was there in my life. What kind of a looking guy was he?"

"A real flashy-looking young sport, wearing a big horseshoe of diamonds and showing quite a roll when he paid. He seemed to have it in for you, so I thought I'd jest warn you—said something about your being a short sport."

"A short sport, eh?" flared up Tucker. "Well, he's got a nerve. One of these tin-horn gamblers, I reckon. Come into camp with a white shirt and a ten-dollar bill and never change either till he leaves."

"No, he's a spender," said Bullfrog. "Got a big roll of bills—always betting that his is the biggest——"

"The *biggest!*" broke in Tucker. "How much of a roll has he got?"

"Well, pretty big," admitted Bullfrog. "They ain't no one called him yet but—say Tuck, if you only had that roll of phony bills! Eh, Tuck? You know the one I mean. That roll you used for flash money when you went in to sell the Lost Wagons. Heh, boy? Say, that was some roll!"

"Yes, it was that," agreed Tucker and scratched his head reflectively.

"I'll tell you," suggested Bullfrog, speaking close in his ear, "we might frame it up to trim him. Can you get that old roll? Well, I'll tell you what we'll do—but, of course, I get my cut!"

"Sure," nodded Tucker, "or you wouldn't be Bullfrog Smith."

"Well, here, now," went on Bullfrog in great excitement, "that young feller is likely to be back. And when he comes in you keep kinder out of sight until he begins to blow about his money. I don't believe he even knows you—but if he does, no matter—you horn in on him and flash your roll. He ain't got much—not over three thousand, at the most—but here's where *I* come in. You can leave it to me, see, to count the two rolls—but I want fifty-fifty, understand!"

"This guy isn't a capper?" questioned Tucker suspiciously. "I don't want to have any trouble."

"Nah! He's jest some cheap sport that's picked a winner at the race track—can you get that phony roll to-night?"

"Well—yes," admitted Tucker. "But, say, what's the deal? How much does this guy bet on his roll?"

"His whole roll!" hissed Bullfrog. "Ain't I telling you—*his whole roll!* The man with the biggest roll takes 'em both!"

"Good enough!" pronounced Tucker and strode out the door, but the cold air seemed to sober him. Not that he had been drinking, but his blood was in his head. He was excited at the thought of the play. But as he stepped out the door he happened to glance at the St. Francis, and that reminded him of Julia. And thinking of Julia, it came to him like a blow:

"Don't bet!" she had said. Did it mean anything? Were they framing this on *him*—to get him to flash his roll and then pinch him for having phony money? He circled out around and slipped in through the back door—and there was Bullfrog, talking to the gambler!

"I'll fix you!" cursed Tucker, ducking back into the night; and, walking swiftly up the street, he sat down on the edge of the sidewalk and dropped his phony roll down a knot hole. Then, still meditating mischief he hid his other roll, for he saw a chance for revenge. But more than revenge, he wanted to have a show-down, to find out who was behind all this; and already he discerned the fine Italian hand of Ketcherside, trying to get something on him that would stick. And Personality Plus, now cheek and jowl with Ketcherside, had doubtless mentioned the roll. They were all out to get him, including Bullfrog Smith, but—how to turn back the blow! He sat there in the darkness, mumbling vengefully to himself, then rose up and sloped back to the saloon.

It had filled up, or so it seemed, in the brief period of his absence; and every man in the place seemed to glance at him covertly as he entered the big front door. Tucker sat down by the stove and looked them all over, and he even found Personality Plus. He was well hid behind the crowd that was watching the roulette game, but Tucker knew him by the look in his eye. For Personality Plus had a weakness for revenge and he could not forbear to gloat. The flashy young gambler who was slated to win his roll was drinking with some more of his kind, and he kept his back to Tucker; but in the mirror behind the bar Tucker could see his hard face, as he took a long look at his victim. Tucker rolled a cigarette and sat smoking it moodily, and the gambler began his talk.

"Well, there he is!" spoke up Bullfrog when it had gone about so far, "why don't you say it to his face?" And he pointed a crabbed finger at Tucker Edwards. The

gambler turned, his diamond horseshoe catching the light, and looked around the room.

"Where?" he asked and, when Bullfrog showed him, the gambler shook his head.

"Nope—that ain't the man," he said. "I've never seen this gentleman before."

"Oh, Slim!" beckoned Bullfrog, and when Tucker came over he jerked his thumb at the gambler.

"Meet Mr. Hendricks," he winked. "The feller I was telling you about—claimed to know you back in New York."

"Uhr!" grunted Tucker, without offering to shake hands. "This the guy that says I'm a short sport?"

"I was mistaken!" declared the gambler, still scrutinizing his face. "No, I'm sure this isn't the man."

"Maybe you were looking for me?" suggested Tucker, still playing up to his part; and Mr. Hendricks apologized abjectly.

"No, indeed!" he protested, "but that's a very unusual name, so I thought you were the Edwards I knew. No hard feeling, Mr. Edwards; won't you join me in a drink?" And he pulled out his much-vaunted roll.

"Not drinking," returned Tucker, his eyes on the roll; and then he glanced at Bullfrog and laughed.

"What you laughing at?" demanded Hendricks, and Tucker shoved his money away.

"They told me you had a roll," he said.

"Well, haven't I?" challenged the gambler, seeing his chance and working fast. "Don't you think that's a man-size roll? I'll bet you dollars to doughnuts you ain't got one half as big! Come on, now; put up or shut up!"

"You're excited," jeered Tucker, "go on off and roll your hoop. What gave you the idea you were a man?"

"Never mind, now," threatened the gambler, "you heard what I said—put up, or close your trap. I'll bet my roll against yours, and leave it to the barkeep, the man with the biggest roll to take both!"

"You poor, damned fool," laughed Tucker exultantly, making a quick dive into his bootleg, "I'll learn you to——" He stopped and searched anxiously, then grabbed at his other boot, and every man in the house stood petrified.

"I've been robbed!" yelled Tucker, rushing wildly toward the door, "some son of a goat has——"

He buffeted his way through the crowd, but before he could gain the entrance the hue and cry started behind him.

"Stop that man!" shouted the gambler, and a man at the doorway charged in like an opposing tackle. They met and went down, Tucker's fists working furiously as he placed one knee in his stomach; but before the fight had more than begun he was borne to the floor from behind. A huge hulk of a man pressed him down like a barn door, others leaped in and caught his arms and legs; and as he rolled over on his back he found Pete Hogaboom astride of him, his fat face aglow with delight.

"Hold him good, boys!" he panted. "He was trying to make a get-away. But he's got 'em—just search those boots."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ATTAR OF ROSES.

The searching of Tucker Edwards was a very complete job, made even more thorough by his bearlike lunges, which left him stripped to the waist; but at the end of it all there was nothing to show for it but the rags which had once been his clothes. Not a bill of any kind, to make out a technical case with, and the detectives released him reluctantly. The big brute who had tackled him was the bulldog-jawed sleuth who had assisted in the shaking down of Shorty Swingle, and the tinhorn gambler who had sported the roll and diamonds had flashed a badge and supervised the job; but they were both at fault and very, very reluctantly, they allowed him to rise to his feet.

"Well," observed Tucker, after he had slipped into his overcoat, "who's going to stake me to the price of a shirt?"

He fixed his eyes on the pseudogambler, now an agent of the department of justice, and that gentleman handed him over a bill.

"Say, kid," he said, "you're lucky—that's all. If you'd fall into a muck hole, you'd come out loaded with jewelry and smelling like attar of roses."

"How do you mean?" inquired Tucker with an innocent grin. "Where do you figure I'm winners on this?"

"Why, some damned dip beat me to it by a minute, and got that roll of bills."

"Well, go git 'im, then!" laughed Tucker, "and send *him* up for life. You're a hell of a bunch of detectives! And say, if you're looking for a crook, why don't you go down and pinch Ketcherside? W'y, there is a guy

that took a hole in the ground that I sold him for ten thousand dollars, and sold it for millions and millions. He's selling it yet—two million shares of stock, on the market at ten dollars a share. And I'll bet you my gold mine against that piking roll of yours they ain't a thousand dollars' worth of ore."

"That's out of my line," answered the department of justice agent briefly. "I'm interested in train robberies. Have a drink."

"W'y, sure!" responded Tucker, who was feeling expansive, "but say, *there's* a guy you ought to get." He pointed to Bullfrog Smith who looked away sheepishly, and the crowd broke into a roar. "Look at the mug on him!" insisted Tucker. "What more do you want? And jumping on a feller like me! By grab, I sometimes think these millionaire pork packers come pretty nigh *owning* the government!"

The detective stirred uneasily and signaled for the drinks, but Tucker's mouth was not to be stopped. He had twigged this conspiracy, and he was bound to make the most of it, let the chips fall where they might.

"Say," he went on, "you're working for the government—who's the man to see about this Ketcherside? He's selling his stock under false pretenses, claiming his mine has struck pure gold, when, as a matter of fact, he hasn't got a pound of it, except what he bought from Shorty Swingle. And, honest to God, Shorty found this gold where they'd throwed it out into the road!"

"I've got nothing to do with that!" broke in the detective with asperity. "I'm detailed——"

"No, but listen!" expostulated Tucker, speaking loud so all could hear, "you're working for the government, ain't you? Well, do you mean to say the government will stand for that? Look at the people who are buying this stock. They're all poor people, except a bunch of millionaires that are stringing along with Ketcherside, and he's got a superintendent that's so dog-goned incompetent he'll throw pure gold into the road. Yes, throw it away for the Injuns to pick up; and for the danged, ignorant Bohunks to scramble for. Why, they tell me that them Bohunks, when they finally caught on, went up there at night and scratched the road plumb down the hill, looking to see if anything was left. But there wasn't any, savvy—there wasn't *any!* Where do you think these stockholders will get off?"

"Aw, shut up!" snarled the detective, now thoroughly out of patience. "You'd better not worry about other people. If some pickpocket hadn't frisked you, you'd be on your way to the penitentiary—that's how close you come to the gate."

"All right," nodded Tucker, turning wearily away. "Well, I'll go out and buy me a shirt."

He went, but the report of his bold denunciation was not long in reaching Ketcherside. It reached him in several ways, and especially in the morning, when there was a strong local tendency to sell. Men who had been holding their stock against all temptations suddenly decided to take their profits, and their example influenced other people; and the report of local selling, when it was received in San Francisco and Chicago, sent the stock down a point. For it was the buying of these local plungers with their fifty and hundred dollars that had sent Lost Wagons to the skies; and if now they were beginning to sell there must be a reason, since, of course, they were right on the ground. So the stock went to nine, and while it hung there, wavering, Ketcherside capitulated and sent for Tucker Edwards.

Tucker had taken a couple of blankets and ridden out on the desert, where he could sleep without being disturbed, and when he rode back he had a gun on the saddle and another in the waistband of his overalls. He had foiled Ketcherside's coup and come back with everything he had, and now he was listening for thunder. When the thunder would rumble out and where the lightning would strike was something that only the gods could tell. But one thing he knew—it would be cloudy in the south when Ketcherside heard what he had said. But the lightning had struck before Tucker reached town, and Lost Wagons was listed at nine-ten.

It was Julia Cleghorn who brought him the summons. Tucker greeted her cordially.

"Well, well," he nodded, "quite a tip, quite a tip. And by the way, let me give *you* one. Don't wait," he whispered, "but do it, right now. You know—get rid of that stock."

"Oh, dear," she smiled back, "you'll never do for an oracle. You don't leave enough to the imagination. But will you be sure to come down as soon as you've had breakfast? Mr. Ketcherside is very anxious to see you."

"Sure, sure!" agreed Tucker, "like to come down to Mike's Place and meet the notorious Shorty Swingle? Give you beans and champagne, and all kinds of good society—Shorty hasn't been sober since he sold."

She made a face and turned away, but Tucker could see she was worried. "I've got 'em going," he chuckled, and lingered so long over his breakfast that they sent a boy to summon him.

"Mr. Edwards," began Ketcherside, as Tucker appeared before him, "I've been thinking of that new mine you say you've found. What is the least you will take for it, in cash?"

"Well, I don't know," grumbled Tucker. "Cash don't seem to appeal to me. Some detective might nab me as I went out the door and pinch me for defrauding a millionaire."

"I can pay you," went on Ketcherside, quite ignoring the allusion, "in any way that you wish; but I should like to have an answer at once. About how much of that gold have you got in sight, if you don't mind my asking the question?"

"Well—four hundred pounds," answered Tucker modestly, and Ketcherside's eyes began to blaze.

"Four hundred *pounds!*" he repeated. "Is this a mere estimate, or have you weighed the ore?"

"Just an estimate," admitted Tucker. "But gold is deceiving, it weighs a lot more than you'd think."

"So I've been told," returned Ketcherside, goggling his eyes out indignantly. "I suppose there's a pack load or two?"

"More'n that," replied Tucker. "I took away one load, and I reckon there's about two more. Of course, I haven't gone down on it——"

"No, of course not!" observed Ketcherside dryly and sat glaring in helpless amazement. "Four hundred pounds," he murmured at last, and Tucker stood waiting patiently.

"Mr. Edwards!" burst out Ketcherside, thumping the table in a fury, "I will not submit to this thievery. Either you take me to this 'mine' and restore my stolen ore or I shall have you arrested—at once!"

"Hop to it!" invited Tucker, "if you think you can cut the mustard. But you don't look bad to me."

"Oh, I don't, eh?" bleated Ketcherside, turning an apoplectic red. "Well, we'll see, young man, we'll see!" He pushed a couple of buttons and sat glaring savagely. "The detectives are coming," he said. "I'll have you in prison for this!"

"No, you won't," returned Tucker, reaching down into his overalls and fetching out his hidden six-shooter. "I'll just take you along with me, until I'm well out of town, and then you can *all* go to hell."

He put his back to the wall as the door burst open, but it was only Julia Cleghorn, with some telegrams. She drew back, startled, as she saw Tucker's pistol, but Ketcherside had recovered his nerve.

"Thank you," he said, accepting the telegrams mechanically. "And Miss Cleghorn, please tell the detectives it was all a mistake—and in no case to interfere with Mr. Edwards."

"Very well," she replied, and whisked out the door, but Tucker did not put up his gun. Ketcherside tore open the yellow envelopes and scanned the telegrams rapidly, his stern face getting sterner with every one until, reading the last one, it suddenly brightened to a startled but rapturous smile.

"What's the matter?" inquired Tucker. "Price of bacon gone up?"

"None of your business, sir!" returned Ketcherside, still gazing at the telegram, and he nodded his head triumphantly. "Remarkable!" he muttered and, reaching for a blank, he wrote out a hurried telegram. "Miss Cleghorn," he said, when she answered his call, "please file this telegram personally. And inform the operator that, if an inkling of this leaks out, I will see that he gets the limit." He waved her away and was dashing off another message when Tucker stepped over to the door.

"Well, excuse *me*," he said, "your busy day, I see." But Ketcherside stopped him with a roar.

"Come back here!" he ordered. "Do you see this telegram? It would put you in jail—if I showed it. But now I'll tell you what I'll do—and I can't stop to discuss it! I'll give you ten thousand dollars for your mine."

"You'll give me two hundred thousand," answered Tucker firmly, "or I'll melt up the ore and skip the country."

"Oh, no, no!" protested Ketcherside nervously. "Don't melt it, whatever you do. Well, I'll give you a hundred thousand—can't stop to discuss it——"

"Two hundred," answered Tucker, and waited.

"Well, two hundred," returned Ketcherside without looking up. "Provided," he added, "you deliver that ore in this office before stage time to-morrow."

"I want the cash in my hands," warned Tucker. "In big bills, every one of them good."

"I'll have them," agreed Ketcherside, still scribbling off telegrams. "But, understand—not a penny, if you are late."

"I'm selling you a *mine*," reminded Tucker, still hesitating. "Remember now—no monkey business—this ain't ore."

"Oh, yes—*yes!*" panted Ketcherside, jabbing savagely at a push button. "Miss Cleghorn, for Heaven's sake, take this man off my hands, and don't let me be disturbed. No—no, wait! You go with him yourself—take Sam and the light automobile—and don't come back without that ore. Bring it back, without fail—and, oh, yes, Miss Cleghorn, write him a check for two hundred thousand dollars."

He plunged into his writing, and they exchanged startled glances, then turned and tiptoed hurriedly out.

CHAPTER XXV.

A REAL MINE.

"Well, what in the world?" demanded Julia in amazement, when they were thundering along the road toward Lost Wagons. She had written out the check, summoned Sam, and changed to her walking costume without knowing in the least what it was about. Since Sam was out of earshot, on the driver's seat of their closed car, Tucker Edwards condescended to explain.

"I've nicked him," he said. "Didn't I tell you I would?"

"Licked him?" she asked, and he nodded good-naturedly.

"Yes, licked him," he answered. "Made him quit."

"Well, if you have," she stated at last, "you're the first man that ever did. What makes you think he's quit?"

"He threatened to have me pinched—sent to Siberia for life—then turned around and handed me *this!*" He drew out the check, which had been duly certified, and waved it like a small flag.

"Yes, but he's buying your mine—and if it's as rich as you say it is——"

"Nope, they all pinch out—formation is bad. Rich as muck, but it never goes down."

"Oh," she observed, and then, after a silence, "I should think you'd be ashamed."

"Nope, proud of it," he said. "Wish I could've nicked him worse, but those detectives were liable to kill me. And by the way, much obliged; some tip you gave me—have you seen Personality Plus? He got kicked under the chin while he had his tongue out, laughing—there's one guy that I broke of sucking eggs."

"You must have had a terrible fight," she responded in awed tones, "we could hear it clear over at the hotel. And there was some one there that was swearing frightfully—I hope it wasn't you?"

"Oh, no," he replied, "I didn't say anything hardly. Too busy making those jaspers earn their dough. Little Attar of Roses stood off at one side, so I couldn't put my mark on him; but you should've seen his face when he went through my clothes and didn't even find a dollar bill.

He laughed consumedly, and she glanced at him reproachfully.

"Don't you take anything seriously?" she asked.

"Oh, sure," he said, "I'm watching Sambo, right now. Is that a gun he's got on his hip? Because if it is——"

"Oh, no," she burst out hastily, "he's perfectly reliable. You don't need to worry about him. But what I meant was, don't you ever stop to consider what it would be like if you *were* sent to prison?"

"Take it from me!" he assured her. "Did you see me in the office with my gun thrown down on old Ketcherside? He'd just punched a few buttons for his detectives to arrest me, but I persuaded him to change his mind. No State's prison for me—I've talked with those train robbers, and they say it's simply hell. No, I'm serious as they make 'em, and if any one should jump me, you duck, because I won't be took."

"Oh, dear!" she cried in alarm, "I didn't think it was so dangerous! Do you expect some one to hold you up?"

"Not going out," he said. "They'll want to find my mine. But when we reach the spot and begin to dig up the gold—we'll have to work quick, that's all."

"Have you really got a mine?" she asked, almost hopefully, and he smiled down at her wisely.

"Don't make me crack my lip," he said at last. "Haven't I just sold it for two hundred thousand dollars?"

"Yes, but they all say," she began, and then her voice trailed off and she fell into a meditative silence. "Do you think it's right?" she pouted, "to take Mr. Ketcherside's gold and sell it back to him for more than it's worth?"

"Let *me* ask one," he parried. "Ain't you taking his money? And isn't he stealing it from everybody? Seems to me it's kind of late to be developing conscientious scruples—I thought you admired these practical business men?"

"Yes, but stealing——" she began, but he reached out a restraining hand.

"Think it over," he advised. "Think it over."

They sped across the Dry Lakes and toiled up the divide and plunged down into Grapevine Cañon. As they neared the portals that open out into Lost Valley, Tucker tapped on the glass and motioned south.

"What's that, suh?" questioned Sam, sliding aside his little door and looking back in frank alarm.

"Take that road to the south," directed Tucker shortly. "We're going down to Mesquite Springs."

"Yes, but, Mr. Edwards, suh!" protested Sam excitedly, "Mr. Ketcherside never said to——"

"*I'm* talking," answered Tucker, "and, while we're about it, I'll just take that gun you've got."

He reached up through the door and removed the pistol from Sam's hip pocket, at which he rolled his eyes at Miss Cleghorn.

"That's all right, Sam," she smiled. "Just drive where he tells you—Mr. Ketcherside knows all about it."

"Oh, suttenly, suttenly," stammered Sam, and turned off down the road, but he shook his head and looked back. They dropped down into a rocky gulch and went jouncing and pounding along until at last the wash opened out and pinched in again by some mesquite trees, where the ground was white with alkali. Here, beneath the roots of ancient trees, three springs of water seeped up and they stopped and refilled the radiator.

"Well, Sam," began Tucker, after they had all had a drink, "I guess I'd better sit up in front. We're going down here to a mine that Mr. Ketcherside has bought——"

"Down whar?" demanded Sam, his eyes getting big, and Tucker pointed to Dry Bone Cañon.

"I'll show you," he said, and at the end of a long hour they crawled up to the cañon mouth and stopped. "Here's where we walk," observed Tucker and, giving Sam some empty sacks, he led the way up the wash. It was only a short way, still up the sandy wash, whose bottom was set hard as concrete; and as they rounded a curve Tucker pointed to the white ledge which cut along the side of the hill.

"See that white streak?" he asked, "coming down into the cañon? Well, right there is where I found my mine. There's a little stringer of lime goes across it up there—that's what caused this secondary enrichment. Something like Lost Wagons—in fact, I believe it's the same vein—only this is a thousand times richer."

They gazed up at it helplessly, then exchanged bewildered glances, for by now they were hopelessly lost. In the immensity of that great valley, with its thousands of writhing washes and its mountains that rose up like iron walls, they submitted to his will as to that of a superior being—a superman, who was at home even here. Gaze as far as they would, they could see no sign of life, no landmark to guide them back home; and they followed behind him numbly, stumbling and limping among the bowlders that were set in the gravel like pudding stone. But he strode on confidently, for no one had found his cache, and at last he climbed up to the hole.

"Well, take a rest," he suggested, "while I set up my monuments and write out a location notice. You'd never think, would you, that there'd be gold around here? Takes a prospector to read these signs."

He piled up a few rocks and sat down on a bowlder while he filled out his blanks in duplicate; and Julia, looking on, felt a sudden suspicion that he was preparing some treacherous coup. He had taken the certified check and brought them down into this country where even the sun seemed misplaced. But there was no sign of gold, nor of ore of any kind. She rose up and began to dig out the hole.

"Let me help you, miss," said Sam, rousing up from his apathy, and Tucker looked on expectantly. They were both digging at once, scratching the dirt back like dogs, when suddenly Sam reared back.

"For the Lord's sake!" he gasped, and Julia made a clutch.

"It's gold!" she cried, and Tucker laughed.

"Sure!" he beamed, "what did you think it was—a salted hole or something?"

"Well, I didn't know," she began, and sat gazing at him earnestly. "Isn't it wonderful?" she exclaimed, and fell to digging. "Oh, here's some more!" she shrieked. "Oh, there's lots of it, everywhere! And it seems just perfectly natural!"

Tucker rose up grinning and hurried off to set his corners—he had seen gold fever before. When he got back they were still clawing wildly, though the bottom was not in sight.

"Is it a really, truly mine?" Julia demanded insistently. "Why didn't you tell me before? I thought from the way you spoke——"

"Sure, it's a mine," swaggered Tucker. "Here you, Sam, don't steal that ore. It belongs to your boss, Mr. Ketcherside."

"Reckon I git *some*, don't I?" retorted Sam, stuffing his pockets defiantly, and Tucker winked at Julia.

"You see?" he said. "It gets 'em all. How'd you like a little keepsake yourself?"

"Oh, I'd love it!" she cried, as he flipped over a specimen, "only, of course——"

"Of course, nothing!" he scoffed. "It's the custom of the country. Come on, let's get this down to the machine."

He opened up a sack and began filling it with ore; and Sam and Julia, still possessed by the fever, dug and dug until they gave out.

"It really *is* a mine," declared Julia in an ecstasy. "And isn't it the heaviest stuff!"

"Heavier than lead," nodded Tucker. "Here, you take this sack—Sam and I will bring down the rest."

He gave her a small sack, and they staggered down the cañon, then back to dig out more; but as they filled their second sacks Tucker glanced up at the sun and kicked the dirt back into the hole.

"Well, leave a little for seed," he suggested grimly. "Come on—we've got to get home."

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SECOND LESSON.

"Isn't it wonderful!" exclaimed Julia, for the hundredth time, as the automobile struck into the road. "And to think that all the time you *told* me you had a mine, only somehow I couldn't believe you!"

"That's the way," observed Tucker. "No use being honest. But if you're a liar, they'll all believe you."

"No, but you practically admitted it!" she cried reproachfully, but he shrugged his shoulders and grinned.

"No use," he said, "you can tell 'em a hundred times; but if they don't want to believe it, they won't. And if they *do* want to believe it, the dangest liar that ever lived is as good as a stack of Bibles. I've been telling these Gold Trails suckers, ever since the boom started, that there isn't any ore in Lost Wagons. I ought to know, I guess. But do you think those boobs will listen to me?

"And then I go out and take that Lost Wagons vein and follow it south clean to Tucki, and when I come back with some ore that's all gold, they won't hear to it—they just *know* I stole it. Well, I'm getting out now—soon as I cash this check I'm going to hit the wind for parts unknown. But what makes me feel good is, it's all honest money—I didn't have to trim no janitors. Nope, I took it away from Ketcherside, the hardest man God ever let live; just to show that it can be done. Of course, it ain't much, compared to what he steals; but I'll get hunk for a few widows and orphans.

"And now say, Little Bright Eyes," he went on slowly, "this is the last time I'm ever going to tell you; but if you've got the brains of a rabbit, take a tip from a true friend and get rid of that Lost Wagons' stock. Of course, if you don't want to, if you're struck on this man Ketcherside and think he's the working girl's friend, that's something different again; but if you think you're a shrewd business woman, playing an inside tip to win, take an outside tip and quit."

"Well, for the last time, then," she cried, "I tell you I don't *want* to sell it. You mustn't think you know it all. We've formed a pool and agreed not to sell until Lost Wagons goes above fifteen dollars."

"Ah, I'm wise," he said. "Why didn't you tell me, in the first place? Judas Priest, don't look like you had much confidence!"

"We all agreed not to tell; but that's the understanding, and Mr. Ketcherside handles our stock. When it goes up he sells and when it's down he buys, and that's the way we double our money."

"Good enough," he grunted. "Here end-

eth the second lesson. I'll never buy any more stock."

"You might join the pool," she suggested slyly, "and double your two hundred thousand."

"Thanks, I'm no hog—two hundred is enough. But—say, did you really mean it?"

"Why, certainly," she smiled, "that is if you'd like to. Mr. Ketcherside would consent, I'm sure."

"Well, don't that beat hell?" he murmured disrespectfully. "Say, kid, you've been with him too long. Do you remember what happened to that last stake I made? Well, I'd like to keep this one, if you don't mind."

"Why, what do you mean?" she demanded, blushing furiously. "You surely don't think——"

"Don't think nothing," he broke in. "But don't you know it's plain stealing—making money by manipulating that stock? What chance did I have when I was on the outside? Well, what chance do the rest of them have?"

"Why, that's the regular thing," she defended stoutly. "They all do it—it's perfectly legal."

"That don't mean anything to me," he answered back. "I always ask whether it's *right*. If it is, I do it, whether it's against the law or not; and if it isn't—well, that's another matter. But, holy smokes, so you belong to that pool, eh? Well, say, that beats train robbing, a mile. And speaking of holdups, I wonder if old Ketcherside will send any one out to rob me?"

"Why, no!" she exclaimed. "You do have the worst prejudices! You seem to think every millionaire is a crook. Why should he want to rob you? Hasn't he agreed to buy your mine? And didn't he send me and Sam along with you?"

"Something to that," he admitted. "But say, do me a favor. When we get back to town you stay with me, will you, until I get this check cashed at the bank? And then you walk out with me, so I can make a clean get-away, and I won't ask any favors of no man!"

"Where will you be going then?" she asked, quite subdued by his manner. "Do you really plan to leave town?"

"Leave!" he cried. "Say, you watch me build a dust, if I ever get that payment in my jeans. I'll knock the corner off of the mountain getting over the rim into Death Valley. But a little bird tells me I'll never get out of town, unless some kind friend offers to help me."

"Well, I'll help you," she laughed. "That is, if you can trust me. You know I'm working for Ketcherside, and a girl that will do that——"

"That's right," he nodded, "but I'll have to take a chance on you—I know you won't stand for cold murder. But that gang of detectives that's been following me around for——"

"I don't believe it!" she declared.

"Well, here's what we'll do, then," interrupted Tucker impatiently. "When we get into town, we'll drive straight to the bank, before any roughnecks get onto us; and then you send for Ketcherside and tell him we've got the metal and ask him to bring out my two hundred."

"Oh, foolishness!" she burst out. "But—well, some one might steal the gold. So I'll do it—aren't you ever coming back?"

"When I get my money hid," he answered mysteriously. "Say, what's going on, downtown?"

They had topped the rim and were gliding down the grade into what looked like a run on the bank; only the crowd of clamoring men were besieging the broker's office, which was lighted up like a dance hall at eight o'clock. Yes, it was already dark, but the whole town was aglare and swarming with excited men.

"It's come," prophesied Tucker. "Lost Wagons has hit the toboggan. Come around, when you need a little stake."

"It has not!" she gasped. "Oh, it couldn't—I know it——"

But she clutched at his arm just the same. They glided down the grade and eased into the fighting crowd, and Tucker glanced up at the stock board.

"Seventeen—*dollars!*" he repeated, and she bounced up and down with a burst of mocking laughter.

"Oh, I *knew* it!" she sighed. "Oh, isn't that grand? And now we can break our pool. Oh, I'm just so glad I could—kiss you!" she cried, but he shoved her rudely away.

"What's going on here?" he demanded, sticking his head out the door and hailing a passing acquaintance and the man came hurrying back to him.

"Git in on it, Tuck!" he said, "she's going

up to twenty. You can't buy a share of stock nowhere. Old Buck pulled in, down at Barstow last night, with two freight wagons loaded with gold. Gawd, the way they wired the orders when that Barstow crowd got onto it—they hocked every dirty rag they had; and the operator here let it slip in spite of hell. Old Buck got that gold from Lost Wagons!"

"No!" exclaimed Tuck, with an incredulous stare and ducked in and motioned to Sam. "Drive to the bank, you danged fool!" he yelled through the glass. "To the *bank* —Judas Priest, can't you hear *anything!*"

They inched along through the crowd until they arrived at the office, which was alight and thronging with people; and Julia was climbing out when he caught her by the arm and jerked her roughly back.

"You get Ketcherside!" he ordered, "or you get my two hundred. If you don't I'll skip out with the gold. Tell him that, the old dastard, and tell him to be quick about it—I won't stand for any monkey business whatever!"

"Well—yes, yes!" she assented, "but *please* let me go. Oh, isn't it perfectly wonderful!"

She wrenched her arm away and darted into the office where he saw her bore her way through the crowd; and then there was a wait, a wait that endured forever while he ground the sacks of gold beneath his feet. So Old Buck had pulled in—and they had found his gold—and that was what was booming the stock! But if they knew what he knew, that Lost Wagons was cleaned, would they hock their last rag to buy? And, oh, if he could get his money, and get away in time——"

"Sam!" he yelled. "Go in and get her!"

"Yessuh!" responded Sam, and he, too, disappeared, never to return to his car that night. It was Julia who came at last, bringing a big paper box, and behind her followed a couple of men.

"Here's your money," she said. "I counted it—it's correct. Mr. Sinjin will put the gold in the bank."

"Yes—thanks," returned Tucker, taking the box in through the door and pawing its contents over hastily. "Well, all right—much obliged—good-by!"

He stepped out the other side, leaving the gold where it lay, and when he looked back, she was gone.

CHAPTER XXVII.

PUBLIC STENOGRAPHER.

The wings of a bird would have been too slow to take Tucker Edwards away; he rode like the wind, spurring his mule at every jump and clutching his money to his breast. Two hundred thousand dollars, the ransom of a king, a stake to last a man for life; and what if some hellion should trail him from town and hold him up in the pass! But they were crazy over Old Buck and his two wagonloads of gold—they actually believed that he had it—and before they woke up he would have a flying start that would take him well over into Death Valley.

He fled laughing through the night, the paper money in a flour sack that bulged like an overstuffed pillow; and at dawn he looked back from the divide above Death Valley, before he plunged down into its vastness. Then for a week he fled on, ever watchful for his pursuers, starved and gaunt, but still going strong; until at last he threw a circle and swung back to Gold Trails as wild and ravenous as a wolf. His money was hidden away in the slack of his clothes, all except a few hundred in his boots, and as he rode to the rim and looked down on the camp his rifle lay across his lap.

There were some hard men in Gold Trails, men who asked no squeamish questions when it came to a case like this, and if Ira N. Ketcherside was still playing his old system, he would be out to get him, regardless. For Tucker had stolen his gold and then sold it back to him—yes, sold it for twice what it was worth—and if that was not calculated to get under a millionaire's hide then Tucker did not know the breed. Yet Tucker had come back to dare him to do his worst, for there was no use hiding in the hills. What he had done was irregular, to say the least; but then, they would have to prove it; and two hundred thousand dollars would hire a pretty good lawyer, if it ever got as far as the courts.

But a change had taken place since he had ridden out of Gold Trails with the tumult of the shouting in his ears; the street was almost vacant, Lew the Megaphone Man was still, half the tents in Rag Town were gone. Tucker shifted in his saddle and looked about uneasily, then rode slowly down into the town. A lone man on the porch of the Happy Days Saloon looked up at him and stepped inside, and as Tucker drew near,

Bullfrog Smith came out and stood gazing at him intently.

"Well, if it ain't Tucker Edwards!" he exclaimed at last, and Tucker waved one hand. Something big had happened, something which he could only imagine; but the camp was dead, he could see that. The broker's office was closed, half the stores were standing idle, and the saloon was as vacant as a church. Yet it was not for him to ask any leading questions, he moved one hand and balanced his gun.

"Kind of quiet," he observed, as Bullfrog regarded him solemnly. The saloon keeper nodded wearily and smiled.

"Dead!" he pronounced. "Dead as a dog. The bank has closed, and everything."

"Bank closed, eh?" repeated Tucker and gazed up the street. "Where's Ketcherside?" he asked, and Smith exploded.

"Ketcherside!" he yelled. "That thieving old rapscallion? He's in hell, if curses will put 'im there. A-ah, when I think of that man and what he done to this camp ——" He choked and raised his fists to the skies.

"Sent you broke, eh?" inquired Tucker and dismounted. He could see that the town was safe.

"Broke?" cried Bullfrog, raising his voice to a wail, "I've never seen the like of it in my life. There wasn't a man in this camp that had a dollar to his name when old Ketcherside closed the bank and pulled out. Even trimmed his own stenographer—and that man of his, St. John, he walked out of camp like a hobo."

"Walked, eh?" said Tucker, and smiled grimly.

"Yes, walked!" shouted Bullfrog, "and Personality Plus—he beat his way out on a truck!"

"Good!" nodded Tucker. "Well, let's have a drink. Here's one man that didn't go broke." Bullfrog set out the glasses and, as a few card players shambled up, Tucker laid down a fifty-dollar bill. "Keep the change," he said, and Bullfrog thanked him profusely, though with an uneasy look in his eye.

"Well, Slim," he said at last, "I'll have to hand it to you—you was the only man in camp that saw through him. You bucked him from the first, and if we'd minded what you said—well, things would be different, that's all. But you and Old Buck, you worked it pretty smooth. Heard the news about Buck? He hired a lawyer, down in Barstow, and replevined all that gold—said the company couldn't prove where it came from—and when they come to look it over he'd melted it down in a Dutch oven and the judge ruled the property was his. But he got it from Lost Wagons, just as sure as you're standing there—and that's where yours came from, too! All I've got to say is, you're pretty damned smooth. Did you make him buy it back from you, Slim?"

"I might've,' acknowledged Tucker. "Who were those jaspers that tried to trail me? Been playing hide and seek for a week."

"Oh—I don't know!" declared Bullfrog. "Some fellers that Ketcherside hired. He claims you stole all that gold. Yes, didn't you hear about it? Why, the commissioner of corporations came clear over here from California to investigate the affairs of the company—got in here the next morning after you left. When he asked about the rumor that Lost Wagons didn't have no ore, old Ketcherside took him in and showed him *yours!* Yep, took him to the bank and opened up the safe deposit and dumped out hundreds of pounds; and, by grab, when we seen that we lost the last of our sense and Lost Wagons went up to twenty-two! Twenty-two!

"Think of that! And now it's down to nahthin'! He unloaded the last of it, right then. And the corporation commissioner couldn't do anything, if he wanted to, because Lost Wagons was incorporated in *Arizona.* Oh, every little thing, me b'y—he had it thought out to a nicety. And the reports of them experts and consulting engineers—say, there was a perfect alibi! Every one of 'em, mind ye, says the indications was favorable for that rich ore continuing at depth; and with hundreds of pounds of it, right there in the safety deposit——"

"The devil!" exclaimed Tucker, and fell to cursing. So that was the reason why Ketcherside had bought his mine as if it were a box of cigars—he had got a wire that the commissioner was coming! And that other wire, which had left him so chipper and gay, that had told about Old Buck and his gold. But the nerve of the man, buying his mine for two hundred thousand and then turning around and making a clean-up on his stock before the hour of reckoning should come. And then using the gold to square his case with the commissioner, and incidentally making a million or two more!

Tucker clumped out and mounted his mule. He had been a mere puppet in the hands of old Ketcherside when he had thought he was playing a leading hand. But—well, anyhow, he had nicked him for two hundred thousand!

Tucker rode off down the street, which seemed more dirty than ever now that half the board sidewalks were unswept. As he passed the closed bank he saw a card on the door of what had once been the Lost Wagons office. It was a very small card, so small he could not read it without dropping down from his mule; but his curiosity being piqued, he stepped off onto the sidewalk and strode over to see what it was. And then he tiptoed back, as if he had seen a ghost or intruded upon something almost sacred. It was only a sign, printed neatly on a visiting card:

JULIA CLEGHORN,
Public Stenographer.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DARK.

Tucker knew that Julia was broke, and dead broke at that, or she would never have put out that sign. Yet there he was with his clothes stuffed full of money. The question was, how to make her take it.

He rode down to the corral in a kind of daze, but when he came back he was smiling. He had acquired a clean shave, and something to eat, and a hunch that all would be well; and when he came to her door he opened it noisily and tramped back to where she was waiting. She was not working—there was nothing to do—but she knew who it was by his step.

"Well, well," he exclaimed as she rose up to meet him, "if here isn't Little Bright Eyes! Feel strong enough to shake hands? Glad to see you; glad to see you. I was afraid you might have left town."

"No, I—I stayed," she said, with a strained smile. "And where have you been, all the time?"

"Oh, rambling round, rambling round—little trip through Death Valley. And say, I sure had a nice pillow. Went off without my blankets, but you gave me enough bills to stuff out a feather bed. Must have counted 'em in a hurry, though—how'd your cash balance come, that day? You gave me a hundred dollars too much."

"Oh, did I?" she cried, and then she shook her head. "You haven't even counted them," she accused.

"Oh, I haven't, eh?" he answered, drawing a bill from his shirt and laying it impressively on the table. "Well, you take this hundred, all the same. Wasn't that our agreement, that whichever one got rich was to give the other fellow a stake? Well, as it turned out, I win, so here's your money—and that's nothing to what you can have. Just say the word and I'll shake out my clothes a little——" He shook his shirt and from the gap in front a shower of bills fluttered forth.

"Why, my goodness!" she exclaimed, "you don't mean to say you've got all that money——"

"In my clothes," he said. "Safest place."

"Yes, but somebody might rob you—they might meet you anywhere——"

"That's it," he nodded, "there's a gang of them after me. But, say now, you're my friend, help me get out of camp and I'll divide with you, fifty-fifty."

"Are they really trying to rob you?" she asked in dismay.

He jerked his thumb toward the door. Julia looked out cautiously, but as no one passed by she turned back and eyed him suspiciously.

"There's no one there," she stated.

"That's good," he said. "I don't look for any trouble as long as I'm here with you. But your friend, Mr. Ketcherside, is a vindictive old rascal—he can't bear to see the other fellow win—so he's hired a bunch of men to kind of follow me around and——"

"Oh, I hate him!" she cried, and shuddered.

"He's a bad one," admitted Tucker. "I thought I'd put a crimp in him; but I pass—it can't be done. He collected that whole two hundred thousand from the widows and orphans while you and I were going to the mine."

"Yes, and he collected it from the stenographers!" she added bitterly. "I guess I ought to know—he got mine. He pretended to be so angry when I spoke of breaking our pool; and so, like a fool, I waited. That was the evening before, when we came back with the gold, and the next morning it went up to twenty-two! And, would you believe it, when he gave me back my stock, I just sat there and watched it go to nothing! It went down to twenty-one, and I thought I'd just wait and—oh, I was such an *idiot!*"

She dropped forward on her desk, and her shoulders shook hysterically, but Tucker sat dumb and waited. He had never seen her in tears before.

"Well, well," he said at last, "he didn't trim us both—and I'm game to live up to our agreement. If I'd gone broke I know that you'd've staked me. So——"

"Don't you dare!" she threatened, as he began to fumble in his shirt. "Did you think for a minute that I'd actually accept your money?"

"Why, sure," he said, "wasn't that the agreement? We couldn't both win, that was a cinch; so I agreed to stake you if you went broke, and——"

"I won't take it," she declared. "But I'm going to show you that I'm not such a fool—I'm going to get a job and begin all over again! Oh, it makes me so mad to think what you used to say—about Ketcherside and me being friends! And all the time he was just using me to suit his purpose. Do you think you can ever respect me?"

"Well, that depends," began Tucker judicially, "on whether you live up to your agreements. Now, I made my brag that I'd take a fall out of Ketcherside—put a nick in his roll, and all that—and I asked you how that would strike you. And you allowed it would be fine, but when I tackled the old 'pothecator you as much as said it was stealing. Well, of course, it was stealing when you get right down to it, but that's a relative term; and, anyhow, I just did it to win your respect—you seemed to think so much of these business men. So here we are at the end of the play, and you're broke and I'm losers, too; because if you don't respect me enough to take my money——"

"Oh, no—it isn't that!" she said. She reached out a hand across the polished table and laid it on his, as she thought. "I've been wrong," she went on, "I see it all, now—and I've given you wrong ideas, too. I believe you're right, I didn't respect a man unless he could make big money; I'd been with business men so long I'd learned to think the way they do, and not to question success. But now that it's over and I've lost all I'd won, I can see I was wrong—all the time. It was worse than gambling, it was robbing poor people who never had a chance, if they only knew it. I know how you used to scold about the widows and orphans, and even the poor seamstresses and stenographers——"

"Yes, but I didn't mean you, kid," he put in gently. "Don't you know I think a whole lot of you?"

"Well, maybe," she sighed. "But I've lost my own respect. I'm ashamed. I used to be so self-satisfied and the world seemed so beautiful. But now——"

"Say, listen," he said, "do you think if I'd forgive you and kind of make you a pet, you could—do as much for me? How'd you like to be a prospector and go rambling across Death Valley with me and a couple of mules? Have to live on jack rabbits and run 'em down yourself——"

"Oh, I'd love to!" she cried, and laughed out. "Do you think we could? But, oh, dear, of course, we couldn't! I just hate being a woman. Every time you want to do anything——"

"I'll buy you a ring," he suggested. "How's that? I'll tell you what we'll do if——"

"No, I've got to go to work," she answered resolutely. "I've been a fool, and I've got to pay for it. I'm going back to San Francisco and get me another position. But—I'll never, never forget! Just the little I've seen of you—and the desert and everything —— Will you ever be coming to the city?"

"Thinking of going there right now," answered Tucker briskly. "Got to get rid of this money, somewhere. How'd you like to take a job running an office for me? I'll have it all in red, to match your hair."

"If you *do!*" she exclaimed. "I just hate the thought of it!"

"Well, how about a home, then, all covered with honeysuckles and——"

"No. You don't understand," she reproached.

"Well, tell me about it," he coaxed, going swiftly around the desk and gathering her into his arms. "What's the matter—didn't your cash balance come right?"

"No," she confessed in a small, subdued voice, "I—I only had ten cents."

"Well, that's all I had when I went broke the last time. What else is it—afraid of the dark?"

"Not with you here," she sighed. "Isn't it wonderful?"

And Tucker agreed that it was.

THE END.

Dregs of Design

By Lemuel L. de Bra

Author of "Mock Don Yuen Meditates," "The Wedding of Chan Fah," Etc.

In San Francisco's Chinatown, as elsewhere, the best-laid plans often go wrong—very badly so, in this case

THE man on the fire escape crouched in the shadows back of the window and looked about him. Below lay the Chinese quarter of San Francisco, a place of garish lights and creeping shadows, of strange noises and ominous silences. Near at hand there were no high buildings, no place from which curious eyes could see the man on the fire escape. The only danger was from the window.

It was a warm evening; the window was half open, the green shade partly drawn and swinging in the gentle breeze that blew in off the Pacific. A dim shaft of light fell through the opening across the black iron-work of the fire escape.

Cautiously the eavesdropper bent forward and looked in. The room was well furnished. In the center was a teak-wood table stripped with a gold cloth of Cantonese embroidery. Seated by the table, reading a magazine, was a young woman, dark of hair and eye, warmly colored.

Opposite the girl, a young man sat in a deep chair of flowered upholstery. He was reading an evening paper. He wore a costly lounging jacket and was carefully groomed; but it was the grooming of one who has more time than taste. It was as though he tried to detract attention from the pallor of his face, the unnatural brightness of his eyes.

With a telltale jerky movement, the man in the armchair crumpled the paper in his lap and drew out a gold watch. He stared at it, frowned, then snapped it shut. Instantly the girl looked up, her eyes tender, solicitous.

"What is it, Billie?"

Before the man could answer there sounded, with startling abruptness, a strange rap. It was not a dull thumping with the knuckles; it was a sharp *rat-ta-tat* with the ends of long finger nails. The girl turned to the man again questioningly. The man nodded. The woman arose and went to the door.

The man on the fire escape shrank back from the window and gripped the iron ladder that led to the roof above. He knew it was significant that the caller had not used the doorbell. Moreover, he had heard that peculiar rapping before. It was the door call of the Chinese underworld.

No one in the room spoke until the door had been closed again,

"Good evening, Chung," said the woman quietly. The tone held a hint of apprehension. It seemed that Chung's call had been expected—and feared.

The Chinaman spoke with clear enunciation, but he clipped his words after the manner of the educated Cantonese.

" 'Lo, Mis' Whipp. Ver' happy see you. 'Lo, Mista Whipp. How you?"

"Fine, Chung," returned Whipp. His voice held that peculiar note that is deep but not vibrant. It was the sleepy rumble of the confirmed morphine addict. "How's business?" he went on. "Going to take up my proposition?"

The Oriental laughed shortly.

"A-h! Your American business methods! Ver' admirable, Mista Whipp; of course. Yes, yes! But so—abrupt, don't you think?"

"I know I should serve tea and chatter with you for an hour before mentioning business," admitted Whipp. "That's the Chinese way; but it wastes too much time. Lil, give Chung a shot of that muscatel."

Glasses clinked. The girl named Lil said something that the man on the fire escape did not understand. Chung laughed. There was the sound of smacking Chinese lips. Then a moment's silence.

"The window?" spoke up Chung suddenly. "It is open. Yes? And the fire escape?"

" 'S'all right, Chung," Whipp assured him. "We're safe here. This place just suits for my business."

"You have the stuff here?"

"I should say not! But I have fifty ounces planted for you."

"How much one ounce?"

"It's the real stuff, Chung," parried Whipp. "Came up from the border just the other day."

"How much?"

"Eighty bucks an ounce."

The man on the fire escape was surprised. For some time, due to the activities of government agents, there had been a drug famine in San Francisco. The price of morphine had soared from sixty dollars an ounce to ninety and a hundred. This, of course, had not affected the price among the legitimate dealers, which remained around fourteen dollars an ounce. It applied only to contraband morphine "on the street." It did not seem reasonable that Whipp could be ignorant of this situation. Either there had been a sudden influx of contraband morphine, or there was some trick in this offer. "Aw, Mista Whipp!" scoffed the wary Oriental. "Too much! Yes, yes! Sixty dollars now in Chinatown."

"All right, Chung. You go buy all you can get. I'll take it off your hands at seventy".

"Seventy all right. But eighty! Too much, Mista Whipp."

Again the glasses clinked; and Chung smacked his lips in keen appreciation.

"Well," spoke up Whipp at length; "if you'll take the whole fifty ounces off my hands I'll let you have them at seventy."

"Seventy dollars. Let's see: That's three thousand five hundred dollars. Lots money, Mista Whipp; lots money."

"Yes; and a lot of dope. You can make a flock of coin out of the deal, Chung. You can turn it over in drams and 'bindles' for close to six thousand dollars."

"Think so? Then why don't you do it?" Chung laughed.

"Because I am getting out of the business. I'm making you a low price for a quick sale."

"You go 'way, mebbe?"

'N-o."

"Well," said Chung, after a silence, "I think mebbe I buy. I come to-morrow this time. Mebbe I tell you I don't buy; mebbe I bring money. See?"

"You'd better bring the money or not come. I mean business. We'll leave the jack with Lil. We can trust her. You and I will walk down to my plant and I'll slip you the stuff."

"Ver' well, Mista Whipp. I think mebbe I come. Good evenin'. Ver' happy meet you again. Good evenin'—Mis' Whipp."

The door closed. For a space there was silence. Then Whipp spoke with sudden heat:

"He'll come, Lil; and he'll pay! He'll pay for all the times he's gouged the last nickel out of me. I hate him and all his yellow-faced tribe. It used to be that chinks sold only opium; and in those days a white man could make an honest living in morphine and cocaine. Now the chinks are getting into the 'M' and 'C' business and crowding us out. Well, I'll get out. But Chung will pay!"

The girl seemed to consider this a moment. Her voice dragged when she finally spoke.

"What—what are you going to do?"

"Remember the trick 'Speed' Mitchell played on me once when I paid him a thousand cold for opium? Well, I'm going to play the same game on Chung—only different."

"Billie!" the girl raised her voice in protest. "Don't do it! Don't think of such a thing! Chung is dangerous. He——"

"Bah! I should worry about him! And anyway we'll be all packed up to-morrow night. Before Chung gets wise we'll be out of town and still going."

"But he will follow you, Billie! His tong will help him. You can't get away from a Chinaman. You can't get away from Chinese vengeance. He'll do something terrible to you. Oh, Billie, give it up. I don't want the money; I want—just you."

"Nonsense. I won't get into trouble. I am——"

"Don't tell me you are as smart as any chink," broke in the girl apprehensively. "You're not, Billie. We can't see through their ways. Remember what happened to 'Red' Sanders when he played that molasses and opium game on a chink in San Diego? Oh, it was horrible! For Heaven's sake, Billie, don't take the chance. I know it's for me you're getting out of this morphine business; and I'm glad of it. For weeks I haven't had a sound night's sleep for worrying. Six months ago there were a dozen big 'M' and 'C' dealers like us on the coast.

Where are they now? In 'stir;' every one of them are doing time. We are the last. And, Billie, the Federal 'dicks' will get us if we stick at the game. Now that you're going to give it up—quit square. Let's get out now, Billie, boy. Please! Let's get out—clean! I'm afraid of prison; but I'm ten thousand times more afraid of Chinese vengeance!"

Whipp said something in reply; but the eavesdropper let it pass. Above the voice of the speaker he had caught the low squeak of a door, a cautious step on the gravel roof.

The man on the fire escape hesitated. He didn't want to miss a word of what was being said in that room; but there was danger coming from above. He dared not be caught on the fire escape and shot for a thief. Neither did he dare to climb down past the lighted windows. After a moment's hesitation he began quietly ascending the ladder.

A few steps brought him to where he could raise his head and look over the roof. There was no one in sight. He listened. There was no sound on the roof. Below, Whipp was laughing; the girl was pleading. Then, as though they had suddenly realized how loud they were talking, one of them closed the window.

Realizing that it was useless to remain longer, the eavesdropper stepped to the roof and started quietly toward the door that led down to the hall on the top floor. As he passed an air shaft he caught sight of some one crouching in the shadows.

"Good evenin'," said a calm voice. "Nice evenin'. Yes?"

Then, before the white man could speak, Chung glided away in the shadows. The eavesdropper did some swift thinking. He ran after Chung and caught him by the shoulder. The Chinaman, with a swift, serpent-like movement, darted aside. One hand slipped beneath his blouse, came out, and a long blade gleamed in the faint starlight.

The white man sprang back, feinted, then swung his left arm around Chung's neck. With his right hand he seized the hand that gripped the knife. Chung made a gurgling sound of pain. There was the tinkle of steel on the gravel roof.

"None of that, Chung Luk! I'm a government officer. Sabe?"

The words seemed to have a remarkable effect on Chunk Luk. His breath rattling in his throat, he collapsed in the officer's arms. Swiftly, the revenue agent passed his hands over Chung's clothes. He found no more weapons, and released the prisoner.

"You come with me, Chung," he ordered quietly. "I want a talk with you. Too bad you caught me here; but that only makes it harder for you."

The Chinaman made no protest. The agent picked up Chung's long knife, wrapped the blade in a handkerchief, and put it in his inside coat pocket. When they had passed through the roof door, the agent locked it again. They hurried down the stairs and along the hall toward the elevator.

"I'll have my eye on you, Chung," whispered the government man; "but don't 'rap' that you're my prisoner."

Chung bobbed his head, but did not speak. Not until they were in a taxi going out Bush Street did he seem to recover.

"You government man, eh? You show me?"

The revenue agent lifted up the lower left-hand flap of his vest and showed a badge. Chung shook his head. He gesticulated emphatically.

"No good. You show me paper. You arrest me; you show me paper."

"Don't get excited, Chung," the officer warned him. "In about five minutes the chief will show you anything you want—and more."

The chief, a middle-aged man, business-like, quiet-voiced, met them at the door of his apartment. At sight of Chung, the chief's brows went up.

"Well, Chung Luk! Hello! Haven't seen you in a long time. Where'd you pick him up, West?"

While Chung sat in the farthest corner, Revenue Agent West told what had happened.

"It never occurred to me that it might be Chung on the roof or I would have risked going down the fire escape rather than have him see me," concluded West. "Of course, he knows I was there to spy on him and Whipp. I brought him along so you could talk with him. Perhaps you can persuade Chung to go ahead with the deal. We can use him to trap Whipp."

"Whipp is the man we want," said the chief thoughtfully. "We've been wanting him a long time. He's worth a dozen small dealers like Chung. Let's talk it over."

Chung listened patiently while they told him what they wanted him to do. His face was masklike, his black, slant eyes cold and

expressionless as marble. When they finished, he shook his head slowly.

"No, no! I cannot do this thing, gentlemen. Impossible. I like help you. Understan'? But if I betray Mista Whipp, every one will know it. Could do no more business of any kind in Chinatown."

They argued with him. They explained that he would be formally arrested the same as Whipp. He would be brought before the United States commissioner and would be held for the grand jury. Then his case would be postponed from time to time until after Whipp was in prison. Later the case against Chung would be thrown out of court because of "insufficient evidence."

Chung Luk appeared interested but not convinced.

"What were you doing on the roof?" demanded West suddenly.

Chung hesitated; then he spoke with apparent frankness.

"I was suspicious of—something. I intended to go down fire escape to hear what Mista Whipp said after I left."

"You're wise, Chung. You should have heard what I heard."

"What was that?"

"I heard Whipp tell the woman he was playing a trick of some kind on you. He intends to beat you out of your three thousand five hundred dollars."

Chung's black eyes widened, then narrowed to mere threads of glittering jet.

"I'd like to see you go through with it, Chung," urged West. "I'm curious to know what Whipp's scheme is."

The chief, watching the Chinaman, saw that West had scored. He followed up the opening. In the end, Chung Luk gave his promise. The next day Revenue Agent West was busy securing warrants of arrest, search warrants, and arranging for the night's work. At half past eight he met with Chung Luk and the chief at the latter's apartment.

"Everything is ready," the chief said. "Chung, you will go to Whipp's place and pay the money. Mr. West says that the money is to be left with the girl while you and Whipp go down to his plant for the morphine. We'll follow you. As soon as Whipp gives you the stuff we'll grab both of you. Understand?"

"Yes." Chung bobbed his head. "Ver' good!"

"And you want to watch out for tricks. Did you ever hear of a trick played on a Chinaman in San Diego by a man named Red Sanders?"

Chung shook his head.

"Neither did we. But there are many tricks in this dope business; so watch your step." The chief took a small satchel from beneath the bed, and opened it. He drew out a large bundle of bills. "Here is the money, Chung. There's an even three thousand five hundred dollars in tens and twenties. Take good care of it."

The chief replaced the money in the satchel. Chung, accompanied by two revenue agents on the narcotic squad, took a taxi for the neighborhood of Whipp's apartment. The chief and Revenue Agent West, in another taxi, preceded them. Earlier in the evening, Agent West had gone to the roof and attached a detectaphone to the window of Whipp's room with wires running to the roof. There was too much at stake to risk spoiling it by being caught on the fire escape.

They left the taxi near Whipp's apartment. The chief dropped out of sight to wait for the other agents. West made his way to the roof and took up his station at the detectaphone. It was not long before he heard Chung come in.

"Good evenin', Mis' Whipp," said the Chinaman. "Evenin', Mista Whipp. Ver' happy see you again."

"Evening, Chung," returned Whipp. "What's the good word?"

"Well, I have thought matter over. Can take fifty ounces at sixty-five. No more."

"You'll take them at seventy or get out. That's flat."

Chung did not reply at once.

"Well, I don't like haggle over business with friend," he said finally. "I pay. Here is money."

West could hear Whipp counting.

"All right, Chung," said Whipp, apparently satisfied. "Lil, you take care of this until I get back. Come on, Chung!"

When the door had been closed behind the morphine dealer and the Chinaman, Revenue Agent West climbed down the fire escape. He stepped through the window into the room. The girl was sitting by the table. She was staring at the greenbacks. She did not appear to have heard the officer enter the room.

"Good evening, Mrs. Whipp," said West, showing his internal-revenue badge. "Just

sit where you are. We'll wait here until they bring Whipp back."

The girl, with a hoarse intake of breath, sprang up. She stared wild-eyed at the officer; then, with a sobbing cry, she collapsed in the chair.

"Oh, Billie, Billie! What have I done? *What have I done?*"

"What do you mean?" demanded West, surprised and puzzled. "What do you think you've done?"

But the girl had fainted.

A short time later the chief and his two other men walked in. One of the agents carried a leather suit case. They had Whipp and Chung with them. At sight of the girl crumpled up in the armchair, Whipp smiled bitterly.

"She's all right," West told him. "Just fainted. I didn't try to do anything for her, because fainting won't hurt her and it kept her quiet."

"The plant is just across the street," the chief said; "but it was clean. All we got was the fifty ounces Whipp sold to Chung. Did you get the money, West?"

West had the money; but before he could answer, the girl aroused and filled the room with her cries.

"Shut up, Lil!" ordered Whipp. "Everything is all right." He turned to the chief. "My attorney lives on the floor below. I'd like to have him here."

The chief sent an officer for the attorney. He proved to be a man whom the officers knew—a shyster who deserved hanging as much as any man he ever defended.

"Lazar, I'm in trouble," said Whipp; "and I want to tell——"

"Wait a minute!" cut in the chief. "You're in trouble, all right; but we're not going to hold the trial here."

"I understand. But if you will permit me to explain, I can save all of us a lot of unpleasantness."

The chief frowned. "I don't know what you mean," he said; "but go ahead."

"Will you have Chung taken out until I get through?"

An officer took Chung out into the hall.

Again Whipp turned to the woman and spoke roughly. "Lil, keep quiet. I tell you it's all right."

Then to the officers:

"You see it's this way: I intended to quit the dope business, but I wanted to make a final clean-up. I picked on Chung because he has the dough. Also, because I'm sore at the chinks for horning in on the 'white' business instead of sticking to their 'mud.' I arranged to sell him fifty ounces of 'M' at a low price. He had to pay the jack before lamping the stuff because that's the only way we 'junk' peddlers do business, and he knew it. Then I took him down to my plant and gave him the fifty one-ounce bottles. You arrested us. But you haven't a thing on me. That isn't morphine in them jars."

"What!" It was Agent West who uttered the exclamation. He had opened the suit case and was examining the bottles. They bore the usual red-and-white label, the skull and cross bones, the name of an American drug manufacturer, and the words "Morphine Sulphate." Each bottle was full of some white, flaky drug. "Then what is it?" demanded West. "It looks like the real stuff. The corks are all sealed as usual."

"It's all phony," declared Whipp exultantly. "Nothing in them bottles but quinine."

The chief and his men could not hide their chagrin. The attorney laughed nastily.

"Can't charge my client with violation of the Harrison Drug Act for selling quinine," Lazar's voice grated on the silence.

"N-o, I'm sorry I can't," retorted the chief. "But I want to tell you something. I'm going to see that the civil authorities prosecute Whipp for this fraud. Bring Chung in."

Abruptly the girl stopped her crying. She swayed to her feet.

"Wait!" she cried. "Don't bring Chung here! I——"

"Lil!" shouted Whipp angrily. "What's the matter with you? This is none of your affair!"

With an effort the girl controlled herself. She stepped forward and her eyes swept over the men standing around the leather suit case.

"Billie!" she cried; "will you ever forgive me? I—I thought I was doing right. You—you know how afraid I was to have you play that trick on Chung; you know how I pleaded with you not to do it. Billie, I—I didn't want more money. I wanted just you and——"

"And I was afraid," she went on quickly. "I couldn't keep from thinking of what happened to Red Sanders when he sold molasses to a Chinaman for opium. I could

picture myself coming home some evening and finding you—as they found Red. Oh, it was terrible! So I decided to keep you out of trouble. I wanted to go away without fearing Chung's vengeance. I did it this afternoon. The fifty ounces of quinine you fixed up in morphine bottles for Chung are in my trunk. The fifty ounces of morphine that were in my trunk—I put in that suit case."

The girl sank back into the chair, covered her face with her hands, and wept. The men watched her stupidly. No one spoke.

Then West tore the seal from one of the bottles, removed the cork, and poured some of the white drug on the back of an envelope he took from his pocket. From another pocket he took a small vial of nitric acid. He poured a drop of the acid on the white drug.

Instantly it turned a brilliant orange-violet.

"She's right, chief!" cried West. "This is morphine!"

For a long moment Whipp stared at the spot of color on the envelope, then at the unopened morphine bottles, and finally at the girl crumpled up in the chair, crying silently. Presently, with steady hand, he got out his monogrammed case, and selected a cigarette. He tapped it on his thumb nail, and struck a match. In the silence, the igniting match crackled startlingly.

"Well, never mind, Lil," said Whipp, in his slow rumble. "I'll be back—in two years. You'll be waiting for me. You're that kind. You see, girl, we've been a designing pair; and now we must taste the dregs. But"—he turned to the officers and held out his wrists —*"ain't—this—hell!"*

SCENERY HE APPRECIATED

RALPH A. GRAVES, one of the high guns of the National Geographic Society, has a poetic soul which leads him, when confronted by large masses of very large mountains, to fulminate, exclaim, and enjoy. In fact, whenever at the foot of, or near the face of, such arrangements of rocks, earth, and foliage, his enthusiasm compels him to explore their inmost recesses so that he may revel in the little hidden dells, dales, and vales, or the little streams, springs, and brooklets which patter and sing over antediluvian pebbles.

Once, when he was beyond the face and in the very heart of the Blue Ridge in Virginia, he set out to find, by imperfect directions, a lovely little stream. He had been told that it sparkled unusually over most unusual rocks. After several difficult miles, he lost his way and asked an old native to put him on the path to the Wilson Cascade.

"All right," the mountaineer obliged; "take the fust hollow on your lef', follow it twenty yards west, then turn to your right and go straight on till you comes to a clump of junipers; thar you'll find a path, sort of rabbit path; follow that till you come to Josh Gilmer's place. You'll know Josh by his checked pants. They are red and yaller; his ole woman makes 'em for him. Some says they fit him; some says not. I dunno myself. I ain't much of a hand fer argyfyin' an' fightin'. You can see for yourself whether you likes their color. You'll laugh yourself to——"

"That's all right," Graves interrupted, looking toward the sun as if he could tell the time that way; "but I'm in a big hurry. Does Mr. Josh Gilmer know the way to the Wilson Cascade?"

"Shore, he does. Anybody knows that. But what I'm telling you, stranger, is that, after you done once set eyes on Josh Gilmer's checked pants, which his ole woman makes for him, a little mess of water runnin' over a little mess of rocks is goin' to seem almighty tame to you."

Where the Lines Meet

By Charles Dorian

Here is a little study in black and white, showing that two can play at the same game

ONLY for two niggers quarreling over the back gates of an observation car the two chief actors in this story might not have worked out their problem.

It was in the days before there was so much talk of concentration and conservation in transportation affairs—hence the deadhead.

Crane Biggar, uncaught burglar, under suspicion, sat in the same parlor car with Henry Glenday, the detective who worked out his cases from telepathic clews. Crane Biggar had learned to think of something else when at close range with the "mind-reading" detective, but this day he could not refrain from dwelling mentally upon the manner in which he was to "pull off" his last and best stunt.

A short distance out of Mountroy the G. L. E. parallels the C. Q. P. for a distance of ten miles, and for a stretch of about one mile runs so close as to give only the usual clearance between two tracks of a double-track road. The matter had been in litigation, each road claiming encroachment. But, having gained nothing thereby, proceedings had been dropped. Then came offers from the G. L. E. to purchase a wide strip of the other's property, including the tracks, signals, and appurtenances—offers which were only met with the old stubbornness.

The G. L. E. then decided to capitalize the situation by adjusting their time-table in such a way as to get traffic away from the C. Q. P. Both trains left Mountroy at exactly the same time in the morning, the G. L. E. keeping discreetly in the rear, creeping up gradually so as to run "wheel to wheel" with the C. Q. P. train where the tracks converged, and then passing it and literally running away from it and arriving at Percola, the terminal, fifteen minutes ahead. These fifteen minutes meant something to the business man, and besides, there was a comfortable parlor car, whereas the C. Q. P. carried a deadhead sleeper.

The amusing feature of the trip was the open rivalry of the opposing porters. Each would stand on the rear platform of his car and deride the other, his railroad and all that pertained thereto. There was excitement for juvenile passengers in the way the trains ran their race and eminent satisfaction for those who rode on the G. L. E. because their train came in first.

On the day when Henry Glenday furtively watched Crane Biggar from behind an open magazine, the burglar was unreservedly enjoying the circus at the rear.

"Hey, yo' boob o' blackness!" yelled the G. L. E. porter when the trains came together. "Wha's yo' injine this mo'nin'? It doan' look 'spectable standin' out dar in de middle ob a field like a los' sheep."

The C. Q. P. porter was ready with his retort:

"Weah on de track, anyways, Mose. We doan need no advice f'om de ditch. Come on up—git onto de track an' let's see if youall's lame or whut's matter."

The G. L. E. train was still a little in the rear. The porter shouted ahead:

"Why doan' yo' git hout of ouah way? Youah shadow's hinderin' ouah progress."

"Whut kin yo' expect, bo?" retaliated the other. "The shadow ob a field mouse walkin' alongside de track's enough to stop dat string o' busses. Why, Ah heard tell dat youah injineer and fiahman done speak in whispers, cas' de leas' noise stops yo' train."

The G. L. E. was gaining.

"Looks like we're stoppin' now," said the porter musingly. "When weah stoppin' it's just de same as youah train goin' full speed ahead."

"No hit ain't, bo," replied the other. "When dis train goes full speed ahead it looks like as yo' train wuz backin' up full speed downhill."

"We doan carry no cah whut people can't ride in. Ah heah youah cah am qua'nteened."

"Doan' need to be," grinned the other. "Ain't nothin' heah you-all could ketch."

"Good-by, old sock, weah goin' to leab yo' now," hailed the G. L. E. porter a car length ahead. "Whut yo' stoppin' fur?"

"Weah pickin' up ballast, 'case weah sca'd o' flyin' wid dis light train."

"Youah road's mean enough to pick up anything. Look out yo' doan' steal none ob ouah ballast."

This almost got the other's goat.

"When it comes to stealin'," he shouted, "look out fo' de G. L. E. Dey hab to keep a detective aboa'd to protect de passengers."

The "goat" shifted instantly. The trains were almost abreast again.

"Ah'd take two pins an' jump youah measly stagecoach and punch yo' nose so flat dey'd think youah back wuz turned," fumed the porter of the G. L. E.

"Say, Mose," came the calm response, "go git de ice jug. Youse gettin' wa'm. Doan' yo' staht talkin' about punchin'. Yo' ain't de conductor."

The G. L. E. porter made a pass at the other across tracks.

"Ef'n ah could get one swipe at youah jaw!" he foamed.

"Yo' couldn' swing on de ga'den gate, yo' pooah simp," twitted the other, retreating a step. The G. L. E. was picking up speed. This heartened its porter.

"Ah'll hab dis out when we gets to Percola—dat is ef'n yo' ain't interred 'tween heah an' theah in dat coffin box yo' drivin'."

This was the last shot. The trains rapidly separated and the roads widened out until the hills swallowed them.

Crane Biggar got off at Barnhill. Henry Glenday went on to the next station intending to drive back and possibly catch Biggar in the act of robbing the local bank that evening. Crane Biggar did not stop at Barnhill, however, but walked back two miles to Fieldstone and drove from there across country to Gorson, a station on the C. Q. P. He was there early in the afternoon and walked three miles west to Pinkola where he arrived at the hour of six. He went straightway through the dusk to the lane behind the bank. He pulled a suit of overalls and cap from his grip and donned them, and with a few necessary tools made his way to the grated cellar window—pried off the grating and clambered in over the coal.

Everybody was apparently at supper so deserted were the streets. The town constable swung past leisurely, stood at the bank corner, and yawned. Crane Biggar had secured all the booty there was—about a hundred and fifty dollars—and had gone back to the cellar. He could see the policeman. He threw two shovelfuls of coal into the furnace. The constable pricked up his ears at the sound and, concluding that the janitor was on duty, stalked away.

Crane Biggar, once in the lane, got out of his overalls, cap, and gloves, and walked briskly away toward the C. Q. P. depot. He secured from the operator a permit to ride on the freight train then at the station, explaining that he had business in Boloqua, producing a commercial certificate as corroboration. At Boloqua he produced the same certificate, getting reduced fare to Mountroy on the Transprovincial, taking the drawing-room under the porterage of the dusky one whose wit had given him an idea.

"When you get everybody bedded down, come on in," invited Crane Biggar.

"All right, boss," answered the porter, who was about the size and build of Crane Biggar himself.

"Do you know," he confessed when they were together in the drawing-room, "I can't sleep. What d'you say to a little game o' craps?"

"E-eh?" questioned the porter, his big eyes rolling hungrily. "Why, it's agin' the rules, boss."

"Come on—it's private here," urged Crane Biggar.

"Seein' yo' ain't travelin' on a pass, Ah'll risk it, boss. Got any bones?"

"No, but you have, I'll bet," said Crane Biggar, smiling.

"You win!" and the grinning porter produced the dice. The game started at ten cents a throw and developed into one at a dollar, with the porter winning. After two hours of this exciting pastime, Crane Biggar had transferred possession of all the stolen money to one 'Nezer Roco, porter on the C. Q. P.

By that time the porter was in a convivial mood. He frisked a bottle from a secret

cubby-hole, and the two drank from paper cups.

"Yo' am de best loser I ebber did see," acknowledged 'Nezer.

"Not so good as you think, 'Nezer. I'm sore when I lose. But let's forget it. Tell me—why don't they use this car for passengers on the southbound trip?"

" 'Case dah's no business. Dey's all sho't-distance travelers in daylight—except de boneheads dat ride on de G. L. E. We run dis cah deadhead so's to have it fo' de trip back. Guess it pays or de management doan' run it, dat's all."

"So you're the chaperon of a deadhead one way and full-revenue porter the other?"

"Not so full all de time as Ah am now," grinned 'Nezer.

"You go right through to Percola, across the border, don't you?"

"Oh, yes, sah. Ouah trip doesn't end till we cross ovah."

"What about customs officers—don't they search the car?"

"Dey walks through an' asks me whut I'se smugglin' dis trip, laughs and walks away. Ef'n youah willin' I'll fetch yo' a pair o' boots across next trip."

"Sure—do. That's mighty good Scotch. You couldn't smuggle a bottle of that across, could you?"

"Now, doan' tempt me, boss. Maybe Ah will."

Crane Biggar poured himself a small draft and filled the cup of 'Nezer. He repeated this often enough to note the soporific tendencies of the drink, and while he baffled sleep himself noticed how perfectly slumberous 'Nezer was.

"Hey, wake up! wake up!" he admonished, shaking the subject.

All the response he could get was a sluggish, "Uh?"

"Come, take your clothes off and turn in right."

There was no understanding sign from the other, so Crane Biggar took his clothes off for him, rolled him over on the couch, and tucked a blanket around him. He then turned in to his own berth and went to sleep.

He awakened early, quite refreshed and looked across at 'Nezer, still sleeping thickly. A passenger in an upper berth rang the porter's bell violently several times and at last gave up. He may have decided to tumble out the best way he could, or it may have been decided for him by the sudden lurch of the car. At any rate there was a thud and the rending of curtains and some split definitives uttered in choleric voices from the man on the floor and the man in the lower berth.

Crane Biggar jumped out of his berth and half dressed himself and shaved. Then he took from his vest pocket what looked like a cake of brown soap and rubbed it into his skin, covering face, neck, shaved head, hands, and forearms until he resembled his slumbering partner more than he dreamed could have been possible. He then donned the gray uniform and let himself out of the drawing-room and opened the porter's private compartment where he found a newly starched smock which he put on over the uniform jacket.

He tiptoed into the smoking room where he saw a big, red-faced man shaving laboriously. At sight of Biggar the razor slipped and the red-faced one roared a damning oath. Porter Biggar jumped back as the other reached for him. The razor dropped to the floor.

"You hunk o' coal—why didn't you answer that bell?" he boomed.

Biggar reached in and slyly picked up the razor.

"Sorry, boss," he articulated, in perfect imitation of 'Nezer. "But Ah wuz so pow'ful sleepy I done heah nothin' 'tall."

"Br-r-r-r," rumbled the other. "Gimme that razor."

"Ca-ful, boss, ca-ful!" cautioned Biggar, wielding the razor in expert feud fashion. "Not in dat tone o' voice, boss, not in dat tone o' voice."

The other grinned.

"Here," he said more amicably. "I've got to get out at Valwaw. Come—I won't hurt you."

Biggar backed toward the doorway and, reaching over, left the razor on the edge of the lavatory basin and dropped out behind the curtains.

When the choleric gentleman was ready to get off, Biggar whisked him down, quite to the manner born, and received his tip with professional ease. He went back to the drawing-room to assure himself that 'Nezer had not revived and went out again in response to the bell. He placed the ladder to let down the first of the Mountroy passengers, and from that moment earned his largess. From that moment, also, 'Nezer

showed signs of "coming to." Biggar hastened to his side.

Noting his own counterpart bending over him, 'Nezer closed his eyes and turned over, moaning.

"Ah's suah a sick man," he groaned.

"Listen, 'Nezer," said Biggar. "How do you feel, now?"

"Ah feel like Ah's lyin' down and walkin' roun' at de same time," he replied to the wall.

"You better stay right where you are, 'Nezer. See, I've put on your uniform and colored my face. I'll do your work till you feel better."

'Nezer turned over and looked large-eyed at Biggar.

"You ain't the gem'man in dis room?" he queried.

"I sure am, 'Nezer. You stay right where you are, and I'll have the doctor see you when we get to Mountroy."

"Ah's feelin' pretty tough, boss. Ah guess Ah'll take youah advice."

Crane Biggar dodged half-clad passengers for the next hour and received many a bump while he struggled at converting the car from a bedroom to a living room. He fairly distinguished himself at that job, and had seats ready for the fully dressed as they required them. When he had executed the last service and received the last tip at Mountroy he returned to the drawing-room to find 'Nezer fully dressed and looking potentially miserable.

Crane Biggar smiled considerately and asked him how he felt.

"Kind o' bad, boss—kind o' wabbly."

"Well, now, look here," began Biggar. "What do you say if you rest up this trip and let me take your place. You see, I pulled it off pretty well this morning. You should see a doctor without delay."

"Oh, Ah'll be all right, boss," replied 'Nezer. "It's two ouahs befo' de train leaves. Ah'll be feelin' bettah then."

"Now, 'Nezer, listen. You take that little capital you got from me and go down and spend the day with the boys, after the doctor fixes you up. I'll handle the job all right. I'm asking it as a favor. I'm going to make a bet that I'll do it, and well. I want another game o' craps with you when I come back."

"We-ell, all right, boss—but if de 'super' comes along, tell him Ah's sick and you's relieving me."

"That's all right. I'll go with you to the exit and we'll get a taxi. We'll lock up the car till I get back."

'Nezer turned over his key and pass and looked as unhappy as any man, white or black, could possibly look.

"Ah doan like to do dis, boss. Suppose yo' doan' come back?"

"Oh, I'll come back, don't worry," assured Crane Biggar.

Reluctantly 'Nezer acquiesced and they left the car and station together, 'Nezer leaning on Biggar to steady himself. Crane Biggar carried his bag to the taxi and gave the driver instructions to let him out at Turbine Street and to drive 'Nezer to the Kansas Klub, a sort of porter's Y. M. C. A., and to get a doctor for him. Crane Biggar left his bag in the taxi and was out of sight before 'Nezer could hail him.

Detective Henry Glenday, lighting a cigar in the drug store at the corner of Turbine and Main, saw the anxious face peering from the taxi window and followed the gaze down Turbine Street where a certain colored person was in the act of turning into a lane.

Crane Biggar gained entrance to the Bank of Mountroy by the simple expedient of knocking down the janitor as he opened the front door to sweep the steps. He had waited in the lane beside the bank until the street was clear for a block and made his bold stroke as the janitor's key was clicked. He figured he could have waited several minutes, but he never waited too long by ten seconds whenever possible.

He had watched that particular bank and had seen the janitor do the self-same stunt every morning at the precise minute, when few people and no constable were in the vicinity. He had also observed that the first employee to enter was the paying teller, whose first act was always to open the vault and lay out the money in vast piles around him inside the grille.

Biggar latched the main door and dragged the janitor, now slumbrous under the opiate held to his nostrils, to the manager's office. Then he waited behind a desk in the main office until the teller arrived and entered his cage, opened up the drawer, and placed the trusty .45 on the counter.

It was ten paces from the grille to the vault and only five to where Crane Biggar crouched. Whistling softly, the teller walked over to the vault and turned the knob that opened the big door. Biggar crept quietly

to the cage and picked up the .45 to augment the one he carried at his hip. It was done so quickly that as soon as the teller swung open the heavy door he turned to confront a black face behind a shining blue barrel. His arms dropped helplessly at his sides. Crane Biggar pointed to the vault. The other entered. Biggar spoke no word but indicated that the other was to "shell out." There was a moment's hushed hesitation and Crane Biggar snapped:

"Quick!"

The teller was in no hurry, calculating that some of the others would soon arrive and would corner this holdup man. He threw out a few packages of small denomination notes, but Crane Biggar demanded:

"Thousands!"

The other fumbled as if searching for the large ones. Slowly he handed out a thick package. Crane Biggar examined it and turned over the ends to assure himself that they were all big and all genuine—a swag, in short, of about a hundred thousand dollars. He swung the iron door shut and locked it and calmly let himself out. He met a man on the steps who gave him a suspicious look and put out a hand to detain him. He drew back when Crane Biggar showed him the blue-barreled toy in his right hand.

Biggar's next move was to go to a public telephone booth and phone police headquarters:

"Bank of Mountroy has just been robbed by a negro who drove away in taxi, number 78432."

In response to the query, "What's that? Who's speaking?" Biggar repeated: "Get the number—78432!" and hung up.

When he sauntered into the railway yards he found that the rival trains were made up ready to leave. He reached the deadhead sleeper and threw himself into a soft seat and heaved a sigh of contentment. He reflected upon the ease with which it had been accomplished and smiled at the reflection.

Where was his friend, Detective Glenday, now? In pursuit of taxi 78432, no doubt!

"Now, for the last look at Canadian cops," he mused. "Once this train lands me across the border the road to South America will be easy. Poor 'Nezer. He'll look kind o' funny trying to explain how he came to be in possession of a burglar's kit and some stolen money. I guess the Mountroy police know all about the robbery at Pinkola by now. 'Nezer won't talk till to-morrow once he takes that handkerchief out of his pocket to dab his dainty nose!"

He heard the "all aboard!" and the train slowly moved out, leaving the G. L. E. train panting expectantly at the depot.

"Now, I must be prepared to kid the porter on the G. L. E. so as to disarm suspicion if our friend, Detective Glenday, happens to be hovering around."

He touched up with a little more "chocolate paint," studied a few facial expressions to make sure that he could still imitate 'Nezer, and took his stand on the rear platform as the G. L. E. train smoked up at the rear.

When the other porter glared across at him, he guffawed:

"Hello, Mose. Yo' allus smiles so pretty!"

"Now, doan' yo' git pussonal," retorted Mose. "I doan' wan' climb on till dat tractor, but ef'n yo' ain't mo' 'spectful to yo' bettahs, Ah'll jest have to go ovah an' chastize yo'."

"By de time yo' wuz gettin' ovah, bo, dis train wud be a mile away and youd jes' be a heap o' dust along the roadbed,."

"Ef Ah evah takes de notion, Ah'll go ovah an' embalm yo'."

"Takes a undertaker to do dat, Mose, and yo' couldn't undertake nuffin."

The trains were within touching distance and with a menacing look and a cry of "Watch me!" Mose was on the top of the brass railing, and in a moment had swung himself to the platform of the C. Q. P. deadhead.

Crane Biggar gasped with wonder and put out his hands in a gesture of self-protection. Almost instantaneously his outstretched wrists were encircled by a pair of wicked-looking steel bands, and the "porter" of the G. L. E. grinned gleefully.

Crane Biggar turned almost white under his paint when he perceived that, while the face of the man before him was like that of Mose, the eyes were unmistakably those of Detective Henry Glenday.

And to make the touch more discomfiting the real porter of the G. L. E. appeared on the platform of his car and waved a cheerful farewell.

Hard-Boiled Whittaker

By Elmer Brown Mason

Author of "Saint and Señorita," "The Black Flamingo," Etc.

Dice or "stud," it was all one to "Zeke" Whittaker, just so long as his hunch was hunching. We wonder what Mabel thought about it all

THE robins had been awake for a full quarter hour. A song sparrow added its note to the orchestra, and a starling whistled sweetly from the cupola of the courthouse. The sun came up over the Palace Hotel, its rays beating against the rear window of Beasley's drug store, and putting to shame the raw, yellow glow of the lamp that swung from the ceiling within. Five men, their faces pallid with the strain of an all-night poker game, were seated around the table. Old Beasley hesitated, then counted out four five-dollar bills and pushed them into the middle of the table.

"There's your twenty dollars, Zeke. Let's see the next card," he said.

The other three players had dropped out. The game was stud poker and, in addition to his hole card turned face downward, two kings and a seven were exposed before old Beasley. The exposed cards in front of Zeke Whittaker were an ace, a deuce, and a three. The dealer slid over the last cards. Beasley's was an eight, Zeke got a four.

"Your bet," the boy suggested.

"I check," said Beasley. "You *may* have an ace in the hole and I *may* have a third king which beats hell out of you. Anyway, you do the betting."

The boy in the old khaki shirt, with a faded first sergeant's chevron on the sleeve, counted out a hundred dollars from the large pile of bills in front of him.

"Cost you that many francs to find out," he said, and leaned back in his chair.

Old Beasley looked long at the cards on the table, and figured his money uncertainly.

"You haven't a straight," he soliloquized, "'cause you wouldn't have dassed to run the others out on an ace, with only a five in the hole. You *orter* have an ace in the hole. Let's see! I'm out a hundred-sixty now. If I beat you, I'll be 'bout even. If I don't, I'll be out two hundred-sixty. Oh, take the pot," he concluded angrily, "I've been playing percentages, all night, and I'm through. They certainly taught you how to play poker, in that man's army."

Out in the early morning sunlight, Zeke Whittaker yanked his civilian trousers higher around his waist and shifted his coat to his other arm.

"Some li'l' poker game!" he exclaimed to the world in general, and Tad Jones, the ticket agent, in particular. "I win four hundred and three dollars. Old Beasley had me beat, that last hand, I only had a queen in the hole. Wasn't a mite scared though. Felt a hunch the minute I sat in, last night, and it's still working."

"What are you going to do with all that jake?" interrogated the station agent enviously.

"I'll tell you, Tad. I'm going to catch the seven-fifteen to New York. That'll bring me there at one o'clock. I'll buy me a sweli suit of clothes and a diamond sparkler for Mabel's engagement ring. Then, maybe, I'll get into a li'l' game and bring some city money back to the country—if the hunch is still working. I'm going mostly for the ring, though," he added hastily.

"Better patronize home industries," suggested his companion. "The Paris Jewelry Store has some big diam'nds."

"No hick ring for *my* girl," declaimed Zeke grandly.

Being a perfectly healthy young animal, trained by three years in the army to take rest whenever he could get it, Zeke Whittaker slept the entire five hours that it took him to reach New York. As fresh as though he had not played poker all night, he swung out of the Grand Central Station with the delightful feeling that his hunch was still working, in other words that the world was his private and delectable oyster. Forty-second Street did not offer him much encouragement in the clothing line, but it swarmed with sidewalk venders. Zeke bought the history of two different divisions,

with a proud consciousness of their inferiority to the one in which he had served, no matter what they might have accomplished, and invested in a patent can opener, a pair of savages that shimmied realistically at the end of an elastic string, and a guaranteed knife sharpener. Then, for a moment, he stood at a loss. Not for long, however. A dapper first lieutenant, two gold service stripes on his right sleeve, coming down the street, gave him his cue. Zeke planted himself in his way.

"Excuse me, lieutenant," he began, omitting to salute as was his civilian right, but unconsciously stiffening to attention. "Where can a feller get a *good* suit of clothes in this *ville?*"

The lieutenant grinned at him delightedly.

"Got your sixty dollars to spend, all at once?" he interrogated.

"Better than that," Zeke grinned back at him. "Got into a li'l' game in my home town and cleaned up. I want something that'll knock the eye out of the home folks."

"You did, did you!" laughed the officer. "Well, let's see?" and he gave the address of a famous clothing firm near by on Fifth Avenue.

Zeke was hard to suit. The clothes the clerk showed him were much too quiet for his taste, decidedly too quiet for the prices asked, he told himself. Negotiations had nearly come to a standstill, when he spied a man in the shoe department, in the next isle, whose garb made instant and violent appeal to him. He wore a light-gray coat, loosely fitted, the pockets bound with gray tape, and the trousers were very tight and turned up at the bottoms.

"That's the goods," the boy pointed. "Got anything like that?"

"He bought that suit here," said the clerk proudly. "It cost him hundred-ten dollars. Do *you* want to go that high?"

"Twice as high, Buddy, if you can please me," answered Zeke loftily, though with an inward gasp. A hundred and ten dollars for one suit of clothes!

Zeke put on the new garments and paid for them from the roll of bills which he prudently carried pinned inside his sock, adding a pink shirt and a dozen white collars to his purchases. Old clothes, together with what he had purchased on the sidewalk, were wrapped up in the same package and, with it under his arm, he stepped out on Fifth Avenue, only to pause uncertainly. Again he was at a loss. There was no jewelry store within sight. Zeke felt, instinctively, that he could not go just anywhere to buy a diamond ring. His army training had not included a course in the values of precious stones. Suppose he should pay his good poker money for a piece of brilliant paste!

Wrestling with this knotty problem he turned down Forty-second Street toward the station, noticing, subconsciously, that the man in the gray suit, the duplicate of which he himself wore, was walking nearly abreast of him. Of course, he might buy a newspaper and go to the store with the biggest advertisement, he ruminated, as he passed the Grand Central Station. That *ought* to be safe. Then again, if he went to a big store, he'd probably have to pay top prices. It was a knotty problem. Zeke turned, noticing the wearer of the gray suit, directly behind him, and, glancing beyond, stopped, and stared at a dapper little man coming down the street. Could it be possible? How different he looked in civies! But it was, yes it actually was!

"Major! Major!" he called, stepping in front of the little man and, this time, coming to a full salute. "It's Sergeant Whittaker of your own battalion—company K. Don't you remember me, sir?"

"Whittaker! Hard-boiled Whittaker!" said the major, shaking hands with him enthusiastically. "*Of course,* I remember you, you old rascal. What are you doing here? How do you like being a civilian? I thought you lived in the country."

"I do, major," Zeke answered. "I just came to town to—to get an engagement ring. You see I busted a good poker game last night——"

"I'm not surprised," laughed the major, "I used to hear that you always had most of the francs after pay day. Have you got your ring yet?"

"No, sir, and I don't know where to go. I'm afraid of being cheated."

"We'll soon attend to that," the man interrupted. "I'll telephone a firm I know, down on Maiden Lane, that you are coming. They'll treat you square, Hard Boiled, and won't charge you too much."

"Gee, I'm obliged," the former top sergeant thanked him, and they crossed the street to a drug store. The major went into a telephone booth, and Zeke stepped to the cigar counter, at the back of the store, with

the intention of purchasing the most expensive cigar in stock, to boldly present to his benefactor. There was a small crowd around this counter, and a familiar rattle struck Zeke's ears, the click-click-click of ivory cubes, followed by a silky hush-h-h, as they slid on a piece of green cloth. The old "top's" eyes brightened, he sniffed the air like an eager hunting dog.

"Big Dick from French Lick," exclaimed a voice; then, in tones of intense pleading. "A four and a six, or two fives! *Come* lit-tle bones, *come* to daddy!"

Zeke pushed closer.

"Here's your address," the major's voice broke in on his absorption. "You take the subway, at the Grand Central, and the guard will tell you where to get off. They'll treat you right."

"Thank you, major, thank you," the boy answered politely. "I'll go right down there. I've—I've got to buy me a tooth brush here."

"Look me up when you're in town again, Hard Boiled. Here's my card. I hope you get a nice ring."

"Thank you, thank you, major," the boy said again, and, as the major turned, at the door, with a last wave of his hand, Zeke was pushing his way closer to the counter.

"Dollar open, who wants it?" spoke up the man with the dice.

"You're covered," said Zeke eagerly, and watched the dice roll forth. They turned up an ace and a deuce, and Zeke won. Then he bet against an eight, and a seven gave him the money. The dice came to him, in turn, and he laid down a ten-dollar note, announcing briefly, "Shoot the piece." Seven one dollar bills fluttered to the counter. Zeke drew down three.

"*Come,* you Paris avi-ator!" he cried and flung down the dice. A four and a three turned up. "Let it lie," he suggested, glancing around him.

"I'll take five," a voice spoke up by his side, and, turning, he saw his man in the gray suit lay down a five-dollar bill. Zeke rolled a six, made his point, pulled down all but five dollars, then threw a five followed by a seven, which lost him the dice. For twenty minutes he won steadily, till the other players, becoming cautious, would cover only a dollar or two, when he held the dice.

"Pretty slow, ain't it?" ventured the wearer of the other gray suit. " 'Specially for an old army man?"

"Chicken feed game," answered Zeke, totally without regard for the feelings of those around him. "We shot 'em higher in the A. E. F."

"I'll bet you did," agreed the first speaker pleasantly. "Say, howdyer like to buck a real game?"

Zeke turned and examined his smiling interlocutor. His better judgment told him that it was rang foolishness to gamble with strangers, city strangers, at that. Still, something within him was working, urging him on. With a glow of delight he recognized the feeling, gave it a name. It was the hunch!

"I've got to buy me an engagement ring," he said doubtfully, "I *might* take a chance after that."

"You can buy a dozen engagement rings, if your luck holds the way it seems to be doing," the stranger spoke with ready flattery. "It's a club, perfectly square game, just around the corner."

The hunch was not to be denied. Zeke gathered up his package from the floor, and followed. They walked a few blocks east, turned, and entered what appeared to be a clothes-pressing shop, and went through it, to the rear.

"He's all right. Come to town to buy an engagement ring," his guide said with a wink to the man who half opened the door and peered suspiciously out at them. They passed upstairs, down a dark hall, and then through another door. Zeke gave a great sigh of satisfaction at what he saw. Five men were seated around a large table, and the game was stud. Only one man looked up from his cards.

"Hundred to buy in. Plenty of change in the game, so we don't bother with chips," he said, and moved over to make room for two more chairs.

The boy deposited his bundles on the floor, reached down in his sock and ostentatiously counted out a hundred dollars before him. The dealer slid him a card and he peeked at it, cautiously, beneath his two cupped hands.

It took Zeke just three hands to recognize that he was in a real poker game, with real players. At first his eyes were alert for any indication of unfair play, but he realized, nearly at once, that its possibility was practically nil. Every man around the table kept his eyes glued to the dealer, while he held the deck, covered the first blind card

with a hand, at once, and slid the first exposed card to top of it, as soon as received. Also it was apparently understood that the dealer should not bet his hand. It was a contest in which poker skill plus luck was pitted purely against poker skill plus luck, to which must be added, so Zeke privately told himself, in his case, his hunch.

The hunch did not seem to be working, however. The boy's first hundred dollars lasted him just twenty minutes. He kept the next hundred for an hour, winning a little at first and then twice, when his exposed cards showed the winning hand before the last card, being drawn out against. The man at his right, who had brought him into the game, was having all the luck. He won two out of every five hands, and the heap of bills in front of him was assuming titanic proportions.

Nevertheless, Zeke put his third hundred dollars into play, with undiminished faith. The hunch would take hold, any minute, he told himself. On the first hand, he lost twenty dollars. The next hand was heavily bet, with two others staying, and Zeke had to call for a show-down. He won, thus increasing his capital to two hundred and forty dollars. The next hand brought him an additional hundred. The hunch was working at last.

One of the players rose from the table, after vainly trying to get some one to cash his check, and left the room.

It was Zeke's turn to deal. The man on his right won the pot, adding to his already enormous pile. The boy rapidly counted the money before him. It came to three hundred and forty dollars. He cut the cards for his left-hand neighbor.

Zeke's cautious glance showed him that his hole card was a queen, and his first exposed card proved to be an ace. The man, to the left of the dealer, dropped; the next man, with an eight exposed, bet a modest dollar; the next player, a queen showing, raised the dollar five, and the bet came around to Zeke's right-hand neighbor, whose exposed card was a king. He raised ten dollars more. Zeke hesitated. There was the possibility of three pairs against him: eights, queens, and kings. It took another ace to give him the winning hand. Something burned within him, however, and, suddenly, with a superstitious thrill, he remembered the beginning of the hand that had made him a victor over old Beasley.

"Fifty more seeds," he said quietly, pushing the money into the center of the table.

The man with the eight exposed hesitated, then saw the raise. The next man, with his possible pair of queens, came in promptly. The boy's right-hand neighbor pushed out fifty dollars from his ample pile. The cards were dealt; a queen, a seven, another king, and, to the former top sergeant, a deuce. The bet was checked around to Zeke and, on fire with the significance of the coincidence between this hand and the one of the night before, the boy counted out fifty dollars.

There was a moment's pause. Then the queen eight hand met the raise, the next man dropped, and Zeke waited breathlessly for what the wearer of the gray suit would do. If he raised, there could be no question but that he had three kings. If he simply saw the bet, it would mean that there was still the remote possibility of catching another ace and beating him, or else stealing the pot, on the supposition that he had tried to establish that his hole card was a second ace—exactly the situation that had faced him in the back room of Beasley's drug store. The bet was only seen. Again the cards were dealt: a king, a seven, and to Zeke—he *knew* it was coming—a three. The betting was checked to him, as before, and, without the slightest hesitation, he pushed out a hundred and sixty dollars.

"Hooked like a sucker," snarled the first man, and folded up his hand.

The owner of the pair of exposed kings gazed long and speculatively at Zeke's hand.

"You got it or you ain't," he stated philosophically, and slowly counted out eight twenty-dollar bills into the pot.

There was a single card wanting, to complete each hand. It proved to be an eight to the pair of kings and seven, to Zeke's ace, deuce, and three, a four.

"Shoot the wad," said the boy promptly, pushing all his remaining money forward.

"Y'ain't got a straight," ruminated his opponent, fingering the money in front of him uncertainly. "Y'ain't—— Oh, well, your aces, which I ain't sure y'got, win," he growled, and folded up his cards.

Zeke stacked the mass of bills in a neat pile.

"I got enough," announced another man, rising to his feet. "The way them cards is running is straight hell!"

The door of the room was flung violently

open, and the lookout jumped inside, shutting it behind him.

"The cops are here," he announced breathlessly. "They're on the roof and down cellar, blocking the get-away."

Zeke grabbed his money and, cramming it into his side coat pocket, glanced swiftly about him. There were two windows, in the rear of the room, and a small one on the side. The boy rushed to the rear two, pulled up each sash in succession, only to be faced by heavy bars of iron. The side window was unbarred, however, and opened on a narrow space between two buildings. Five feet below was a tangle of wires, and then a thirty-foot drop to the ground.

The boy did not hesitate. Better to be electrocuted, than sent to jail! He jumped. The wires caught him. Several broke, one hissing fire writhed close to his thigh. Swinging down on those that sagged lowest, he dropped to the ground. He found himself in a narrow passage and turned, with the instinct of the hunted thing, from the noise of the street to the rear of the buildings. The narrow passageway led to a door into the alley and Zeke, opening it a crack, peeked out.

To the left, not twenty feet away, the red car of a police captain chugged steadily, its power still on. The owner was just climbing the fence, into the yard back of the house where the raid was taking place. Zeke glanced behind him. The door at the other end of the passageway opened and he caught sight of the blue uniform of a policeman, just as he dodged into the alley. A quick glance to the right showed him that that way was blocked and, with a flash of inspiration, he sprang into the car, crouched low in the seat. He shifted a lever. The car moved forward, increased its speed. He twisted the wheel as it reached the end of the alley, and found himself in the street.

Zeke never could recall clearly how he reached the Grand Central Station. All he knew was that he traveled fast. There was a vague memory of some one crying out behind him, the rush of feet, and then the car carried him swiftly on. Once he nearly collided with a heavy truck, struck the gong in front of him, in warning, and the sound that issued from it scared him nearly out of his wits. It cleared the path for him, though.

The old top sergeant had sense enough to walk, not run, through the station. He reached the lower level and pressed toward the gate whence went the train for his home town. With an unuttered prayer of thankfulness he saw that a train was all ready to draw out, the last passengers crowding through the gate. He pulled out a five-dollar bill, held it in his hand.

"Ticket!" challenged the gatekeeper.

Zeke looked up, and caught the glint of a bronze button in the man's coat lapel.

"Buddie," he whispered, leaning forward, "I gotter buy my ticket on the train. The cops are after me. Have a heart and let me through!"

"You ain't stole nothing?" quickly interrogated the man.

"Nothing but a police captain's car," answered Zeke swiftly.

"Gawan through, I'm shutting the gate," grinned the ticket taker.

The train was well out of New York. Zeke slipped off his coat, laid it on his lap, and cautiously counted his money beneath its protection.

"Nine hundred fifty dollars and some chicken feed," he chuckled. "Some li'l' poker game, and with a swell finish!"

A sudden thought struck him.

"My Gawd!" he exclaimed aloud, "I never *did* get that ring!"

A novel by Mr. Mason will appear in an early issue.

WEIRD ECONOMY

THERE are too many people whose ideas of reducing the cost of living can be summarized as follows:

Keep down the public-school teachers' salaries, and patronize the high-priced dancing teachers; let the grazing lands go to waste, and buy more shoes; keep down the preachers' salaries, and patronize the swell cafés; build no more railroads, and buy a new automobile; curse out the sugar profiteers, and buy fresh candy every day—and take a lot of vacations!

The Man in the Barrel

By Patrick and Terence Casey

Authors of "The Scarlet Walnuts," "The Wolf Cub," Etc.

It was a strange method that Olivares and Calderon took to engineer that Panama rubber plantation. But then the San Blas Indians were a strange people

UP in the Panamanian jungle, where the Chagres River narrows into a noisy torrent, "Art" Lincoln came in sight of a fluviograph station as ancient as the French canal régime. It consisted of a steel cable spanning the river and conveying a hanging car in which the station keeper might ride out at flood times to measure the height of the tide and the speed of the current. Against the greenness of jungle on one high bank was a hut of wattled bamboo.

Lincoln would have thought the station only an unused relic of the French days, had he not spied, leading down from a tall ironwood tree to the hut, a number of wires fine as spider threads. He judged from this that the hut was connected by telephone with the central control of Gatun Dam and that therefore it was still being maintained as a station by the canal commission.

Sometimes the Chagres River rises a score of feet in a single day and at such times it is distinctly up to the hydrographers, remote in the jungle, to warn the Gatun control. Promptly then the massive reënforced-concrete gates of the dam are swung shut, the spillway opened to let out the excess flood and energy, and the irascible Chagres thus prevented from working any great harm.

The Portuguese, in sole charge of the station, proved as hospitable as a baron of feudal days. In broken English he explained that it was good to see a stranger where so few strangers ever came. Not that he was lonely. He had for wife a buxom, coffee-colored Panamanian woman, very neat in red calico wrapper, who carried his youngest child in her arms and was continually being surrounded by three other dusky-eyed offspring clinging to her skirt.

The Portuguese looked to be quite an old-timer with his white, curly hair and patriarchal beard, kinky with tight, snowy ringlets. He stuffed the sunbrowned American with jams, bananas, and coconuts, gathered wild from the jungle, and with the meat of the iguana, that monstrous lizard of the Isthmus, whose flesh is sweet as that of possum.

He was a native of the Canary Islands, he said, Joao Portalegre by name. More than ten years prior, driven by bleak poverty, he had emigrated to the Zone at the call of the American commission to work as a pick-and-shovel laborer, "a Silver Man," on the canal. But the deadly climate of Panama had slapped him down upon his back and whitened his hair before his time. When he had been released as convalescent from Ancon Hospital, the "Crazy Yanquis," as he called the Americans, had sent him up here, to this ancient and primitive station, to act as a sentinel over the treachery of the river. He had picked up sufficient English by that time to be able to make himself understood over the telephone.

He showed for his guest the frank curiosity of a child. The knapsack, with the lightweight blanket rolled in the rubber poncho atop, was to him a grab bag of wonders. He was not so much surprised by the medicinal supplies, such as iodine against thorn-poisoning and permanganate for snake bites; preventives like those were furnished him free by the commission; but the paper cartons which kept gingersnaps so fresh, and the thermos bottle which retained coffee at the same even temperature, were, to his child-like mind, creations nothing short of miraculous.

"And these ees tins of compressed soap! Do you hear, Luiza?" he asked the brown woman, bustling about the rear of the hut.

"No need to usea paddles on the stones of the river, but just a leetle peench of soap and *Por Deus!* there ees suds enough for a whole-week's washa. Ah, these crazy Yanquis!" He shook his white, curly head. "Will they nevaire be done killing poor Joao with marvels!"

Like a little old monkey, he toyed with the Colt's revolver, and felt the edge of Lincoln's machete as one would a razor. Was the señor an army engineer, he asked, eying the American's stout military shoes, spiral cloth leggings, khaki breeches, flannel shirt, and dented Baden-Powell. No? Then he must be some prospector, out to wrench the gold from the virgin hills. But no, again? Ah, then he must surely be some planter bent on clearing the everlasting jungle and planting rubber trees; or else a timber cruiser who thought to freight hardwood logs down the churning Chagres. These crazy Yanquis were always doing mad things, and always for money.

Lincoln shook his head almost reprovingly. He was none of these things and, above all, was he least desirous of gold. He explained as well as he could, a smile on his high-cheek-boned face. He was merely a walker of the rough places of the earth. He wrote books about his hikes, and people bought those books to read, and so he gained money whereby to live and to make new tours. For instance, Joao had heard of the Andes, those high mountains of South America, yes? Well, he had finished, only six months before, a trip down that backbone of a continent from Colombia to Chile. It was thus he had entitled the book he had written of the trip and, according to latest reports, the book was selling like hot cakes in the States.

"But I no can understand," said Joao. "To walk all along the bridge of that nose of South America like a stubborn fly—and only to write a book! I nevaire heard the like!"

His head commenced shaking from side to side as if it suddenly had become loose on his neck.

"But it ees just like you crazy Yanquis," he philosophized. "One digs a great hole in the ground, and the spiggoties laugh, but he—he keeps right on and soon the water flows through and the ships ride along like quetzal birds. And you, señor; you walk and get jungle fever, yes, and almost die, like I did down on the canal. But you don't become a station keeper, talking all time over a magic wire. No; you write many words about it, and people read and say, 'There is one brave man,' and they give you money.

"But here is what? You keep on a-walking. Why? Why do you usea all that money for more trips? Me, I'm only saving against the time I go back to the Canaries and buy a wine shop; but you, señor, you go on walking like a canal engine, always fulla steam. All you crazy Yanquis are machines, forever working, nevaire done. It makes my head ache!" And he screwed up his face, as if in pain, and clapped his hands over his ears, for all the world as though trying to shut out some infernal din.

Art Lincoln laughed uproariously at the pantomime.

"It is only that we build large plans which ride us hard till we fulfill them," he apologized. "F'rinstance, there's the plan I'm engaged upon right now. I have traversed South America from Colombia to Chile. Now I'm afoot on another lap—from Colon to Colombia. After that comes Canada to Colon. In the end I hope to have walked down the whole New World from the Pribilofs to Patagonia. Quite an alliteration, what?"

He could only smile fatuously at his own witticism, for the Portuguese did not seem to grasp it.

"What's that you say?" he asked, releasing his head from his hands, as if the better to hear, while his face, with straining intentness, remained screwed up like that of a weazened monkey. "What is the trip the señor now walks?"

"Through the mysterious Darien from Colon to Colombia," replied Lincoln, rather enjoying his own revelations and the effect of them upon his auditor. "That's the name I'll give the book. I plan to cut my way with the machete through the jungles of the Isthmus until I hit Bogota, from whence I started the South American hike. I'm fairly well known in Bogota—why, what's the matter, Portalegre?"

Joao's eyes were distended and popping. Lincoln became aware that the brown woman had paused in her work and was standing in the rear of the hut, listening. He thought he could make out her eyes glowing from the dark like those of a jungle cat.

"No, no, señor!" exploded Joao. "*Sao Francisco*, no! Above here, over the Chepo Hills, lies the countree of the San Blas!"

"Good enough!" smiled the long-jawed American dryly. "That's an idea for a title, 'Afoot through the country of the San Blas.'"

"But you will nevaire make eet, señor. No white man ever gets into San Blas countree. Those Indios, they have much, much gold; and I have seen two, five, seven tropical tramps pass through here, one after another, all saying they would get that gold; and they nevaire come back this away. Señor, you listen to me, Joao Portalegre, yo' friend. Eet is madness. You will nevaire get through that countree alive."

Lincoln smiled, a bare parting of the lean sardonic lips. He knew all about the San Blas, that unique race of Indians who, since the day of Balboa, have never moved back their frontiers before the onpress of the Caucasian, and who keep sentries armed with Mausers along those frontiers to guard against the trespassing of strangers, white, brown, and black.

"Listen, Joao," he said, still smiling. "I have just finished a walk that few, if any, white men have ever made before me. I have climbed peaks 'steen thousand feet high and dropped down never below five thousand feet above sea level. I have crossed snow fields in icy winds, soaked by sleety rains. I have crawled into *tambos* that were darker and dirtier than any Eskimo igloo. I have eaten guinea pig until my stomach churned in rhythm with the howlings of the heights. And I have gone stark mad with fever and loneliness in the green jungles of Bolivia. It was a nightmare, but I won through. Do you think when I have beaten out nature in her worst moods like that, I am likely to fear a poor few Indians?"

Joao's white head was once more loose upon his neck, shaking continually from side to side.

"There ees no understand," he sighed heavily. "You Yanquis are all crazy, just as I always say."

But he glanced obliquely, as he spoke, into the rear of the hut and, seeing his wife once more moving about her work, motioned Lincoln toward the door with a quick covert jerk of the head. Once out in the stinging sunlight, he drew the American a goodly distance from the shack before he would trust himself to speak.

"Señor, you tell me true that you go after San Blas gold and Joao will not try to holda you; but to write a book, that is no *importa!*" He looked up at the American questioningly.

"It is important to me," returned Lincoln. "It is all I desire; not gold, but simply to write a book."

"Well, listen to what I tella you and maybe then, no, you will turn back." Joao's voice throbbed with sincerity and a certain fear. "Señor, there is much that is strange going on up there in the San Blas hills. I know, because I have heard, in the dead of night, the noises of men breaking through the jungle close to my hut—many men—so many that I think them war parties. And I have heard a thin kind of whistling, very shrill like the cry of a woman and, right after eet, a howling like the wolves make in the old countree. But that is no hungry cry of wolves, that howl; eet is the baying of one great bloodhound. I have heard heem tearing madly through the brush in answer to the whistle, and I know he is a bloodhound, because of one night.

"It was like thees. Often I got up to peek, but nevaire once could I see those war parties. One night I did not even strike a light. As I came to the door, I heard something outside, breathing along the sill—you know, *sniff-sniff* like a dog. I fling open the door. And there, señor, I see heem—a great bloodhound, red-colored in the moonlight, with a black nose, hanging lips, and many wrinkles over hees head!

"Me, I leap back and then I hear a voice spikking in Spanish: '*Abajo, Leoncillo!* Down, leetle Lion!' And I look out at a man pulling at a rope to holda that hound back.

"But such a man! Señor, in the old countree, when I was a boy, my fathaire articled me to a wine merchant who traveled all over the Peninsula buying up crops of grapes before they were plucked from the vines. We came, one time, into the town of Salamanca in Spain, where there is a great school of many houses, and there, in one of those houses, I saw a suit of leather and steel worn by Balboa when he was lord of thees place. Señor, the man I looked upon that night wore the same kind of suit exactly as Balboa.

"'I am the ghost of El Hombre de Casco, the Man in the Barrel, Vasco Nunez de Balboa!' he say, very big, to me. 'Now into your *bohio*, Joao Portalegre, and no more spying unless you woulda join me in the spirit world!'

"Me, I fling shut the door in hees face, and when I look out again, he's gone."

The Portuguese looked up at Art Lincoln, the corners of his eyes wrinkled from the glare of the sun so that he had the appearance of a quizzical old monkey. The American seemed quite sobered.

"Joao," he asked, "how long is it since you were down in Colon or Panama?"

"T'ree year, Panama; more'n five year, Colon. There's no usea Joao going down there——"

"Not even to collect your salary?"

"No, señor. I get sixty-five dollar every month, but no needa for eet up here where yams and coffee grow at the front door. So gov'mint, he banks eet for Joao against the teme I go back to the Canaries and buy the wine shop."

Lincoln nodded, smiled broadly.

"Well, I can't accuse you then of being a movie fan. But it might easily be," he added, "that a motion-picture company was up here, making a film of Balboa's exploits on the real historic territory and thought to have a little fun by throwing a scare into you. But don't look so blank, old man. Tell me; just what was the nature of the sickness you had before the government pensioned you off as a station keeper?"

"Sickness? Me? Dengue fever, señor."

"That's it!" exclaimed Lincoln. "I had something of the same sort, as I told you, down in the jungles of Bolivia. Morbid obsessions and queer hallucinations, very much like the one you have just retailed to me. Probably a recurrence of the fever," he ended abstractedly.

Joao, looking more than ever the puzzled monkey, began shaking his white head again.

"There ees no understand," he sighed despairingly. "You Yanquis are all crazy!"

II.

Upon a bald, curiously weather-rounded hill, a San Blas sentry stood leaning upon the muzzle of a Mauser carbine and gazing down into a grassy clearing that sloped away below the knoll. He was the young *bravo* called, in the aboriginal tongue only used for warriors' names, The Walking Stick of the Sky. He was on guard over the entrance to one of the few trails into the forbidden country of the San Blas.

He was a short, stocky individual of a light yellowish-golden complexion. He wore only a pair of blue dungarees and a derby hat. His naked torso glistened with body dampness like polished copper. As he squinted into the sunset glare, his eyes seemed oddly small and almond-shaped and this, added to the flatness of his face and the effect from his protruding teeth, gave him altogether an Oriental cast. He did not look so much the Indian as the Japanese. He was about five feet tall.

Down in the clearing, he had sighted a movement in the tall, rank grass. Shading his eyes with one hand, he made out an indented Baden-Powell moving above the green shoots. He got a sense of a pair of sparkling eyes returning his stare from under the stiff brim of the sombrero. He ran forward a few steps, dropped to one knee, and threw up his carbine to his shoulder.

"*Lagarto blanco!*" he cried, sharp as an explosion among those silent hills. It was as if he uttered anathema, yet all his words meant was: "White lizard!"

The Baden-Powell continued to weave onward through the grass, and he could distinguish the shape of a knapsack upon the trespasser's back.

"*Boca abajo!*" he cried in his bastard Spanish. "Mouth to the ground!"

The man below obeyed instantly the command. He threw himself flat on his face, the grass flattening under him in a great rude circle. The Walking Stick of the Sky grunted at the abject display of submission. After an interval, he called:

"Go back! You are of the wrong color. You cannot enter here. Go back!"

But the form sprawled upon the grass did not move. The buck-toothed San Blas waited like a statue of bronze. Then again in Spanish, with an effort to make himself clearly understood, he shouted:

"You are of the vile skin and you are forbidden to go any farther. Behind me lies the homeland of the noble Cuna-cuna. They kill all ignoble breeds who are pale as a snake's belly or black as a rotten banana. You must get up and go back the way you have come."

Art Lincoln lay like a rock in the grass. The Indian waited once more. Tropic twilight, which lasts but a breath, thickened about them. The bronze statue irked at the immobility of the white man. He dropped a shot within a foot of Lincoln's head. It swished through the grass, cutting off a stem or two, but the American did not stir.

Hesitantly the buck-toothed *bravo* stepped forward a stride; then a watchful pause. He came down the barren slope of hill, always with the stirless form of the trespasser in sight. When within ten yards, he fired again. The bullet clipped close, pursuing an uncanny parallel to Lincoln's spine and almost bumping the bulge of knapsack. The shot was intended to keep the American from rising, but it seemed needless. Lincoln made no move of any kind.

The dish-shaped face of The Walking Stick was blank with mystification like the stupid face of a Japanese of the coolie class. Trembling like a wild animal ready for instant flight, he drew slowly near. With naked foot, brown as a walnut, he kicked the sprawled form in the ribs. The American turned half over with the brutal impact, then swung back on his face inertly. He was flabby as one dead.

The Walking Stick grunted his surprise and swiftly stooped above the man. With one hand holding the barrel of the grounded Mauser like a staff, he sought to turn with his other hand the American's head. He gave a shrill, querulous cry, like a monkey's squeak. The eyes in the lean, sun-browned face were closed! He dropped to his knees and, with what seemed the insatiable curiosity of a child, tried to lift one lid with blunt thumb.

Abrupt as an alarm clock when the ordained time is reached, Art Lincoln electrified then into activity. He reached up and got the Indian beneath the chin, shutting off his breath; he threw all the weight of his body over upon the San Blas, hurling him on his back upon the grass; and then he sat upon him and pinned his brown arms down to either side as to a cross.

The Walking Stick of the Sky squirmed like a cat. Lincoln reached out with one hand, tore a cubical segment of rock from the soil, and pounded the thick skull beneath him just once. The Indian made no sound, but his body went suddenly limp and yielding as dough. He was unconscious.

The way was clear. With the Mauser carbine couched as tenderly as a babe in the crotch of his left arm, the machete in his right hand, and the revolver dangling from his hip, Art Lincoln walked up the clearing and around the foot of the bald hill, and entered the jungle-embowered trail into the San Blas country.

Lincoln did not rest that night. He pressed on through the black tunnel of trail, desirous of putting as much distance as possible between himself and the boundary line with its menacing punctuation of sentries. The air of the jungle was fetid and close as that of a greenhouse, the soil underfoot rich as a pudding with vegetable rot. His boots made constant sucking noises as he wound around great boles of trees and stepped high over python-thick vines spun across the path.

Dripping with sweat and winded, he squashed through a boggy trough in the trail and, tracing out the reason for the heavier dampness, located a spring of fresh water and had his first drink in hours. Then he pressed on, swinging his machete where the lianas and arborescent ferns formed a network barring his way.

Perhaps it was the effect of that cold drink when he had been hot and sticky with perspiration; but when dawn suffused the embowered trail with dim light, like the light deep under the sea along the ocean's coral-forested floor, he was squeamish at stomach, his joints felt stiff. Now he was bathed in sweat and the next moment shaking with an icing chill. He paused for a bar of chocolate, compressed and potent food. He knew what he had. It was jungle fever, but not a new case; it was but a recurrence of the torment that had racked him down in the jungles of Bolivia.

Again came the strange terrors that had made a nightmare of that walk through the Bolivian wilderness. In the path before him, he saw another man, the image of himself but unharassed by fever, strong and stalwart, who swung sturdily ahead with his knapsack, poncho, and kodak upon his back. He cried out, begging the fellow to lessen his killing pace, and yet he hardly knew whether it was he who cried or whether it was not some phantom toiling after him, weak with fever.

He did not know his own identity. Everything got mixed. No longer was he in Darien but back again on the rim of South America; for he sensed the Quichua Indians all about him like the dirty loathsome rats they were. He knew them of old, with their monstrous heads, barrel chests, curlike fawning manners, and scaly hides—the very paupers of creation!

He tripped over a liana in the path and fell upon his face. He could feel his brains

giddying round, and then suddenly there came a snap, and his mind cleared of all hallucinations like a pane of glass wiped off by a rag.

He got laboriously to his feet and stumbled on. But instantly he was obsessed by another morbid fancy. It was as if he were drunk and his movement stirred the alcoholic fumes in his brain to perform weird imagery. Not that he saw again the vision of another self setting a cruel pace for him. It was rather now the ineradicable feeling that he was being escorted along by many unseen shapes, a host of shapes, silent as apes and implacable as shadows. He understood then. This was why he had thought of the dirty Quichua Indians.

He was sure they were there, though their passage was screened by the intervening thick curtains of vines and leaves and ferns. He heard a twig snap as if under the paw of some prowling animal; he caught a rustle among the leaves where no wind stirred; and at last, in crossing a cleared space over the shoulder of a knoll, he had a glimpse of three squat golden-brown shapes that fled from bush to bush, paralleling his course. They were San Blas *bravos*.

He tripped once more over a coil of vines, but this time when he sought to rise, he could not rise. He felt the earth heaving and dizzying under him, and he clawed his fingers into the crawling silt, and clung on. And then, as his senses drained from him, he saw them coming out of the greeny walls to either hand and closing in upon him, not hurriedly nor with any cries of exultation, but softly, with mincing wariness and a dour glumness of brown faces, like a gang of curious but very stupid apes. His head seemed to split under a lightning flash of blue-white light, and he knew no more.

III.

How much later it was when he came back to a hazy consciousness, Lincoln never could tell. It might have been hours; it probably was but a few moments. The sunlight, creeping upon the heels of the dawn and poking through the greeny plat above, showered upon his face like a rain of tiny gold arrows. He became aware of a human taint in the hot-house closeness, the smell of sweating bodies, and instantly recalled the San Blas.

Moving his head out of the mosaic of sunlight, he saw them squatting in their dirty loin cloths about him, their knarled, brown hands dangling between their legs, their yellow-golden hides without fret or shiver under the drip of the leaves. They were not looking at him. Their oddly slant eyes, black and bright as beads under the fillet-bound strands of hair, were turned toward a recent break in the foliage that hedged the right side of the trail.

There came quietly out through that break in the green wall, a tall, white man clad in a medieval costume of leather and of certain metal trappings that gleamed like silver. He was for all the world like some swashbuckler stepped out of Elizabethan folios. Upon his head was a shiny helmet; about his torso, a gleaming corselet; and, over hips and thighs, tassets plaited of the same luminous metal. Beneath the cuirass was a jerkin of thick, stiff leather, splotchy with light and dark shadings as if poorly tanned, while through the wide interstices in the joints of the hip harness showed slashings of crimson silk. His high leather boots were reënforced with metal greaves like the gregorianas worn by Spanish picadors when fighting bulls from horseback, or the leg guards affected by American college men when playing football. Attached to one hip was a gold-hilted sword so long that its point dragged far behind him along the ground.

Art Lincoln was lying on one cheek in the black, odorous soil, looking up at him out of a single vague eye. He could see the cavalier's face between the metal cheek pieces that dangled by straps from the helmet. It was a long, narrow face, bloodless, gray, and ascetic looking; the face of a ghost save that it terminated in drooping mustaches and a luxuriously black beard. Small wonder that Joao Portalegre had thought this fellow the spirit of Balboa! He was, in every minute detail of casque, leather jerkin, breastplate and Toledo blade, the walking duplicate of that Spanish Conquistador, Vasco Nunez de Balboa.

The squatting Indians made way for him, and he stepped into the ring and up to Art Lincoln. He looked down at the American and he winked. Lincoln thought his eyes were playing tricks; it was all part of a feverish dream, anyway; but no, the cavalier persisted in batting one lid for a full moment. Then he turned upon the circle of frozen-faced *bravos* and, flinging out one arm, mailed of fist and vambraced to the elbow, said in Spanish:

"My children, this captive is of the stuff of Conquistadores to dare come up here. I cannot see you crucify him or even cut his feet and lips to ribbons, as is your custom with such trespassers. I claim his poor bedeviled body and what remains of his intrepid soul. I promise that he shall be gone from your homeland as soon as he is strong enough to walk back the many miles, and that he shall return empty-handed, without having glimpsed your women or caught a sparkle of your gold rotting in the creek beds. What say you to that, Cuna-cuna?"

There was a heavy murmur of dissent. All those beady eyes swung toward a shriveled yellowish Indian with a thin, white beard. He was the oldest man in the group and apparently some sort of cacique. He spoke up:

"It cannot be, O Son of Careta. He is brave, this captive, but he has come too far. He is a white lizard and we must be rid of him forever."

The long, narrow face of the man in armor went paler, if that were possible, livid as lead.

"You will not agree!" he exclaimed. "Carajo, no more words! I will show you what can or cannot be!"

He put a little pewter whistle to his lips and blew a long, shrill blast. It was a call of some kind, Lincoln recognized, the same strident blast that Joao had heard. It slipped through the jungle, a sharp needle of sound. On the back of it, as in answer, came from a little way off a great crashing of growths. Some large animal was bounding precipitantly through the brush toward them.

The congress of San Blas warriors leaped to its feet and swiftly melted away, padding through the surrounding curtains of vines and leaves, and disappearing like creatures of smoke harshly blown upon.

They were none too soon. Out of the break in the green wall, through which the cavalier himself had appeared, sprang a huge, bay-colored hound, red tongue lolling and white fangs exposed. It was the same hound Joao Portalegre had seen, reddish colored, black-muzzled, pendulous of lips, and wrinkled transversely over the head. But it was no ghost animal. It panted in a mighty realistic way; its short coat of coarse hairs was all pasted into spikes with sweat; and here and there were scratches from the jungle thorns, etched with blood. Because of the domelike shape of its head and the heavy wrinkles over the eyes like the folds of a cowl, Lincoln, hazy though he was, knew it instantly for a bloodhound.

"Ah, Leoncillo!" exclaimed the Spaniard at sight of the brute. "You are ever faithful to the whistle, but you seem always just a bit too slow to catch the wily San Blas!" And he smiled down at Lincoln, as if at a subtle joke of his own making.

The splendid animal gave a throaty, fearsome rumble, at sound of the man's voice, then leaped up upon the shiny breastplate as if striving to kiss his cheek in an ecstasy of love. Lincoln did not know what to think then. Never before had he suffered such contradictory hallucinations: sepulchral men in armor who winked and joked, brown, oily savages that disappeared as at the rubbing of some Aladdin's lamp, and ferocious-looking brutes that seemed to have no more harm in them than playful kittens! It was too much for his febrile brain. He slipped into merciful insensibility.

In the days of fever that followed, Art Lincoln enjoyed several lucid intervals. He noticed, at these times, that he was lying upon a hard, narrow couch beneath a shelf of books in a room walled with logs and pierced by loopholes. At such times, the Spaniard, as he called his host, would either be rolled in a rug and asleep upon the rough poles of flooring or else stirring about the room, cooking food, concocting cooling drinks for him or dosing him with quinine grains wrapped, like cigarette tobacco, in brown papers. Incongruous as were the brown cigarette papers, even more so was the fact that the cooking was done on a modern oil stove.

The Spaniard had laid aside the cumbersome suit of silvery armor and went about attired only in a pair of drill trousers and cotton shirt. But at certain hours during the day, he would rub his nose and brow with a gray face cream, slick down his mustaches and beard with moistened hands, don the leather-and-metal regalia, strap on the long sword, and go down a ladder through the trapdoor in the floor.

Without arising from his couch, Lincoln could look through a hole in one of the flooring poles where a knot once had been. For a little, all would be blackness beneath him. Then would regularly come the creak of a swing door opening and fingers of sunlight would poke into the place, and thereat he

could make out piles and piles of boxes and bulging sacks below.

In the heat of the day, commingled odors were constantly seeping up through the interstices between the rough flooring poles. He began to differentiate them; the fragrance of coffee, the redolence of sugar, the dry scent of flour and mush, and the eggy smell of powder. The lower story of the log house was a storeroom of foodstuffs and ammunition. He began to identify the gleam of the sunlight on the well-oiled barrels of modern Springfields, stacked in racks about the walls.

Still another incongruity was the alarm clock in his room, labeled as having been manufactured in La Salle, Illinois, U. S. A. But watching it between feverish dreams, Lincoln noticed that the Spaniard always essayed forth at particular hours: five o'clock in the morning, just after daybreak; ten o'clock when the sun was mounting to meridian and the heat becoming unbearable; three o'clock in the afternoon when the heat was lessening; and, finally, in the cool of twilight at seven o'clock. Each time, he was gone for no more than twenty minutes.

Querying the man about the wherefore of the masquerading proved entirely futile. He would not talk about it, let alone explain it. Whenever Lincoln tried to question him, he would advise the American not to worry himself with needless conjecture but to rest and regain his strength and later, perhaps, everything would be made clear to him.

One daybreak, after the Spaniard had sallied forth in his medieval trappings, Art Lincoln staggered up from the couch and, feeling oddly guilty and small-souled, peered through one of the many loopholes. He rubbed his eyes in unbelief at first glimpse of the plantation surrounding the log house. Its orderliness was startling, to say the least, when one expected to see a wild clutter of jungle. Art Lincoln looked again. The plantation was composed of young trees, almost naked as poles and no more than man tall, laid out in exact ranks that stretched on and away beyond the reach of the eye.

While he was thus peering out, he thought he heard, far off, the deep-toned ringing of a bell and, a few minutes later, sighted a large number of denim-clad men coming up the broad, gray avenues between the rows of trees. Some of them carried pick axes, shovels, and rakes over their shoulders, while still others staggered under the burden of heavy brass cylinders with hoses attached as if for spraying the trees. They were field laborers, he judged, from their implements and blue working garb; Panamanian Indians of some breed; but certainly not San Blas. They were easily a head taller than any San Blas he had seen, and they looked a shade darker of complexion—more a chocolate-brown.

One thing he knew for a surety. The Spaniard went forth at this moment of daybreak to ring the plantation bell, arouse the men, and set them to work; he walked out again, at ten o'clock, to tell them to knock off for lunch and the midday siesta; he restarted them to work at three in the afternoon, and called it a day in the twilight hour of seven. But why he bothered to cream his face into a cadaverous hue and wear that apparently heavy armor and awkward sword was beyond the logic of the American, unless it was that these plantation laborers were continually running off into the jungle and he thought to hold them in slavish thralldom by appealing thus to their superstitious imaginations.

Lincoln was in a fret of incontainable curiosity by the time the Spaniard returned to prepare breakfast.

"What are you growing in the plantation about this house?" he blurted out, unable longer to hold himself in check. "And who are those laborers? They don't look like San Blas."

The Spaniard's creamed face went positively leaden with bloodlessness. He stood transfixed in the center of the floor, a strange figure in lustrous armor, for all the world like the mummy of Balboa save that, between the metal cheek pieces, his eyes smoldered like twin coals. For a conscious time, he was silent. At last, his voice metallic with a certain restraint, he said:

"You have failed to respect my hospitality, Señor Americano. Therefore, and at once, I must escort you back the way you came, out of San Blas territory. I did not intend to act until you were stronger, but you have forced matters to an issue. It is all in accordance, you understand, with the promise I gave the Cuna-cuna when I rescued you from their hands."

Lincoln nodded, his face flushing with mortification. He had acted ungratefully, he knew, and he felt the sting of the man's words deeply.

"There is only one thing I would ask of you," went on the Spaniard in the same strained tone. "It is a little errand I wish you would perform, once you arrive again in Panama City."

"I'll do it gladly," said Lincoln, welcoming this opportunity to redeem himself. "It'll give me a chance, señor, to show my regret at having spied upon you and to prove my appreciation for your many kindnesses."

The Spaniard did not reply, but drawing from under his jerkin a bulky legal-size envelope, handed it to Lincoln. The envelope looked as if it might contain formal writs of some order. The address was typewritten across the white face in capital letters and Lincoln remembered, at sight of that typewriting, the steady retaplan of clicking noises he had so often heard issuing up through the rough pole flooring and which he had attributed to the gnawing of rats.

"You notice the address?" remarked the Spaniard. "It merely says, 'Avenida Centrale, thirty-five, Panama City.' I have purposely omitted the name of the establishment. When you deliver this letter and see the name of that establishment, the whole fog of mystery which apparently surrounds me will be dissipated before your eyes."

This was a bait, thought Lincoln, to insure the delivery of the packet; but he said nothing, only bowed his acquiescence.

IV.

The Avenida Centrale is to Panama City what Broadway is to New York or Market Street to San Francisco. It is a narrow, crowded artery extending throughout the city from the Railroad Plaza to Las Bovedas, the famous old sea wall. Lincoln had little trouble finding number thirty-five. It was down near the beginning of the avenue, in an old Spanish block of banking houses. Number thirty-five was, according to the sign above the doorway, the office of the San Blas Rubber Exploitation Company.

The name meant little to Lincoln, so, entering, he told his business to the coolly dressed Spaniard who alone occupied the cubby and whose round, swarth, boyish face gave the lie to his smooth, bald head.

"I am Alonzo Calderon," this personage introduced himself. "I am the business partner of Candido Olivares, the man you met up in the San Blas hills. Tell me all about him. It is six months since I have had any word of Don Candido."

Lincoln complied with Calderon's request, which was easy to do, as he knew so little of the mysterious partner. He handed the youthful-faced Spaniard the bulky envelope he had received from the man in armor. Without opening it, Calderon acknowledged that he knew what it contained by saying:

"This is an account of how things have progressed with the rubber plantation, from day to day."

"Then those were young rubber trees I saw planted in rows."

"Yes, señor, as you might judge from the name of this office. As those trees are still young, we have not earned anything from them as yet, and will not for several years to come. But now that you know this much and are out of the San Blas country, I think it would be but just to attempt to repay you for your services as messenger by telling you the rest of our secret."

"Thank you," replied Lincoln. "I'm anxious, believe me, to reach some solid ground in this mystery."

"Well, understand that Olivares did not tell you up there, because he feared that, inadvertently, you might betray the scheme to the Indians, or else talk of it to that Portuguese fluviographer on your way down, and thus give the old gossip a chance to retail it to some passing San Blas buck."

"Then it is the San Blas you fear?"

"*Si, si;* and for good reason! But that's the end of it; here's the beginning. Back in 1912, while the United States was still engaged in building the canal and the eyes of the world were naturally upon the Isthmus, the new Republic of Panama, to raise money for administrative purposes and perhaps also to line the pockets of the politicians who had just succeeded in making her a sovereign state, took advantage of the wide publicity to put up for sale, in the financial markets of the globe, certain tracts of land which were within her borders but still did not pay allegiance to her government. In other words, they offered for sale thousands of acres of the Darien jungles, San Blas land, which never had been trodden by white men since the time of Balboa.

"The financiers of Panama offered about a hundred thousand *hectareas* or double acres, at a dollar gold a *hectarea;* that is about forty cents the acre. Whoever bought the title to so many *hectareas* could cut hardwood or grow rubber and thus quickly become rich. The concession would be his

and his descendants' for a hundred years, guaranteed by the Republic of Panama, the San Blas not having a word to say.

"If the land failed to grow rubber or show hardwood, you were to receive your money back; but, in the case of the plantation succeeding, five per centum of the gross annual profits were to go to the national treasury. Otherwise the only condition was that if no work was done by you on your *hectareas* within the first ten years after signing the deed, then the title would be void and become revested in the Republic of Panama and your money forfeited.

"There was a boom in rubber at the time and everybody wanted to grow rubber trees and become rich quick. I was one of the many. I had just turned twenty-one and come into a patrimony which was thought considerable in Spain, but would be scoffed at as a mere pittance by you Americans—something like fifteen thousand dollars. I bought ten thousand *hectareas* of San Blas jungle from a Madrid broker, thinking to pull a fortune from the soil of the New World as did my countrymen, Cortez and Pizarro before me. At that time I did not know that such a people as the San Blas existed on the face of the earth.

"But I soon found out. My agent, here in Panama, pretended to send up native laborers with supplies and tools to clear off the jungle. Of course, if I hadn't been such a young ignoramus, I would have known that any Panamanian would as soon shoot himself and end it all quickly as venture within a mile of the San Blas frontier. But this I only learned after I had spent several thousand dollars more and got a report from the agent that no work could be accomplished on account of the continued hostility of the San Blas Indians, of whom, for the first time, he then gave me a full and true report.

"I was thunder-struck. I saw the joker in the contract, the swindle into which I had dropped almost my last *peseta*. At this time of despair, Olivares, who was a roommate of mine at the University of Salamanca, came to my aid. He had no money, but he had courage and brains and, between the two of us, we decided to tackle the San Blas from some angle that had never been tried before and thus force them to allow us to work our land. We knew, by then, that it would be humanly impossible to freight the hardwood from the property down to any point of civilization.

"We spent considerable time in research work. We read all the old chronicles relating to Balboa, Pedrarias the Cruel, and other Spanish colonial governors of Panama. We read up-to-date reports and were particularly struck by an account written by your American tropical tramp, Professor Pittier of the National Geographic Society, who knows more about the San Blas at first hand, I believe, than any other living man. We found out that, while the Cuna-cuna hate for good reason all white men, they still venerate the memory of that man who stowed away to Panama in a barrel, Vasco Nunez de Balboa, the most fair-dealing of all Spanish Conquistadores, who thought so much of these very San Blas that he took to wife the favorite daughter of Careta, their chief cacique.

"That was point number one in our attack. Olivares said he would venture into the San Blas country and take advantage of the persistent reverence of Balboa by going attired in a suit of leather and armor copied from that worn by Vasco Nunez and preserved, as we well knew, in the very museum of our alma mater, Salamanca.

"The second point hinged upon the superstitions preserved by the San Blas in regard to the bloodhound of Balboa, Leoncillo. You know, in that far time of discoveries and conquests, my countrymen used war dogs. They were bloodhounds trained to track down the enemy and tear them limb from limb. Balboa, humane though he was by nature, still was not above using the tricks of his time. He had a squadron of such dogs and the leader was called Leoncillo or the Little Lion. This hound is supposed to have saved Balboa from assassination more times than one, by being able to scent out a treacherous Indian from the friendly ones. At any rate, he is still remembered by the San Blas in such a way that, to this day, they fear any dog of the breed and shape of a bloodhound.

"Well, the short of it is that we had an exact duplicate made of the accouterments of Balboa, only to save weight and add a mystifying touch we had the metal parts fashioned of aluminum. Then we purchased a bloodhound of the old war-dog breed, a canine as nearly like Peter Martyr's description of Leoncillo as it was possible to find—in other words, a massive, bay-colored hound with a black muzzle. This dog Olivares trained to know the name, Leoncillo, and to

answer to the sound of a little pewter whistle. He was to put fear into the hearts of the Cuna-cuna, should they fail to reverence the lustrous armor of Balboa.

"By the time we reached Panama, Olivares had sprouted a mustache and beard which he arduously trained to droop over the corners of his mouth and point down from his chin after the style affected by the *Bigotes*, those bearded soldiers of Spain, of whom Balboa was so fine an example. Poor Candido looked years older, but as if not satisfied, he prepared a gray paste which, when rubbed over nose and brow, gave him a shockingly cadaverous appearance, like one sapped of blood and but newly risen from the grave. Then, in Panama, we separated, I to open this office and furnish men, money, and supplies, and Olivares to venture, with his face creams and hirsute adornments, his medieval costume and bloodhound, into the forbidden San Blas hills.

"How well he succeeded you, señor, have witnessed. The San Blas venerate him as Vasco Nunez de Balboa on a second visit to earth, while they fear with a superstitious terror his dog, Leoncillo. Profiting by that veneration and terror, we have been enabled to work our hectareas, for, of course, you understand, we are equal partners in everything.

"We have cleared off the jungle growth, planted thousands of young rubber trees, constructed bunk and cook houses of solid hardwood logs. We have even been able to import contract laborers, Doracho-Changuina Indians from the province of Chiriqui, each one carrying a pack of provisions or agricultural implements, and all safeguarded in their march by Olivares in his suit of armor, with sword trailing and his bloodhound bringing up the rear."

"So that's it!" exclaimed Lincoln. "That accounts for the sounds Portalegre, the hydrographer, heard and thought came from marching war parties!"

But Señor Calderon apparently did not hear the interjection.

"Sometimes," he said abstractedly; "sometimes I think of Olivares as another Rajah Brooke in a more perilous Sarawak. Whatever success we have had is solely due to his arrogant courage. He wears the metal-and-leather harness of Balboa, and the San Blas believe he is the spirit of Vasco Nunez come back to earth after five hundred years. Sometimes I think those poor, naked Indians are not so far wrong!"

There was a pause. Art Lincoln, in turn, seemed plunged in deep thought.

"Do you know," he remarked dryly, after a space, "that gives me a prime idea. I think I'll get a similar suit of leather and aluminum, and buy a bloodhound, and go back into the San Blas hills, and get Olivares' permission to use his scheme to my own end. You see, it is very important," he explained earnestly. "I gotta write a book called, 'Through Mysterious Darien from Colon to Colombia.'"

PROVIDING HIS OWN AMUSEMENT

THE train was a denial of every hope, design, and ideal wrapped up in the phrase, "rapid transit." It aroused memories of the tortoise, the snail, and the hookworm. Its wildest burst of speed provoked a pale hope that finally and at a later date it might get under way. It was a study in perpetual lack of motion.

Passengers turned bolshevik and cherished ill-concealed plans for lynching the conductor, engineer, and flagman. The conductor, sensitive to the waves of antagonism which played about his form, was in a constant state of impotent rage. He lost all control of himself when a young college student sang out, with every indication of delight:

"Come on, Bob; let's step out and pick a lot of flowers!"

"Stay where you are!" yawped the conductor. "There ain't no flowers along this track."

"I know," retorted the lover of blooms; "but I've got a package of seeds in my pocket."

A Chat With You

SOMETIMES we like to look at a map; for preference, the map of the North American continent. We do not mean the modern commercial map, with its imaginary boundary lines of States, and its real lines of railroads and canals, and its little dots for cities. We mean the sort of map you find in a physical geography, a picture of the country as it was before our ancestors took it in hand and started to make it over. The forests are still uncut, the streams are full of fish and the woods full of deer. The quail are calling and the wild geese flying overhead. The coal is still unmined and the mountain streams unsullied. Some people like to gaze into a crystal ball and see visions in it after awhile. We like to look into the map for our visions.

HERE we have it spread before us, a new Canaan, an unspoiled Eden. Here are Canadian and New England hills where the shaggy Appalachians sweep in close to the shore. Here is the Hudson valley, where a slow glacier gleamed and crawled through ages. Here is Long Island, the terminal moraine of that glacier. Here are shining sandbars and flat backcountry, stretching for leagues down through the Carolinas to tropical Mexico, the blue Atlantic fretting at the shore and carving it into curious bays and estuaries. Further west is the first great barrier, the towering mountains with scarcely a pass between their peaks and scarcely a break in the forest that covers them. Still further, the country sweeps down in long plateaus, in laurel thicket and bluegrass meadow toward the great central valley, the limitless prairie, with the Father of Waters and all its tributaries flowing in its midst. And then the plain slopes up again to the towering Rockies, then another valley, and then the coast range.

IF we keep on looking at the map and allow our imagination a little freedom, after the manner of the crystal gazer, we will begin to see things. On a thin Eastern strip, between the mountains and the sea, people are gathering into cities, New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Charleston—presently another city around the peninsula of Florida at the mouth of the great river—New Orleans. Trees are falling, forests disappear; in their places are cornfields and plowed land. Later, about the time of the Revolution, one or two breaks are made in the mountain chain. Then solid streams of humanity are pouring through. Kentucky, Ohio, Illinois—all the great slope of the central valley is changing its face and turning from wood and prairie to farm land. The Indian trail has become a turnpike road, the place where the trails cross, where the rivers meet, has become a fort, a village, finally a smoking city with tall chimneys. The changes are fast and kaleidescopic enough, but now something happens to make the movement still faster. It is a spark, glowing out toward the Pacific coast. Its name is gold.

PRAIRIE schooners and pack trains struggle slowly across the plains and deserts. Hordes of other men make their way across the narrow Isthmus of

Panama and up the western coast. Dreamy, half Spanish countrysides are flooded with hordes of eager Americans, the sleep of centuries is over, and the furious swarming of a people has commenced. Railroad lines begin to push themselves across the plains and up the mountainsides. While the East is still in the death grapple of the Civil War the swarming goes on. Across the Rockies that lie in what was then the Territory of Washoe, and is now Nevada, the immigrants swarm California-ward. Roughest and most colorful of all the mining camps, Virginia City rises overnight on the site of the famous Comstock Lode. It is time to look up from the map now, to lay aside the crystal. We have come to the moment which William MacLeod Raine has chosen for the opening of his latest and greatest story. The first installment will appear in the next issue of THE POPULAR.

THE title is "In Bonanza." This is an old mining term, which might be translated to mean "in luck." There's a lot of real history in the narrative, a lot of real men, some of whom died with their boots on. It is part of the epic of our country in the making, the sort of story that any red-blooded American would like to read. There are people still alive who can remember some of the early days in Virginia City. Mark Twain lived there for a while. It is the chronicle of a tempestuous, colorful, full-blooded yesterday that is fading fast in the memory of the present generation. Added to this, it is a genuinely big story, the sort for which this magazine is famous.

THE complete novel with which the magazine opens is by Jim Fellom, a writer new to our pages, but worth watching. It is called "The Wherewithal," and is a tale of California, a mystery-adventure story of the outdoors. There is a stirring sea story by John Fleming Wilson; a story of Alaskan miners, "The Quenchless Spark," by Theodore Seixas Solomons; another Casey Ryan story by B. M. Bower, and a great story of the prize ring by W. R. Hoefer. These are only a few of the things in the next number of the magazine, one of the best that has ever gone to press.

GEORGE W. HOPKINS, sales manager of the Columbia Graphophone Company, was talking not long ago to the Advertising Men's Club of New York. He said that he was taught golf by two good players who went round with him in his early golfing days. They came to a tee before which was a pond that must be carried in the drive. Both the good players put away the new balls which they had been using, and took out battered "floaters," the idea being, of course, if they knocked the balls into the pond, they could get them again. Both drove straight into the water.

"I boldly selected a brand-new ball, not a 'floater,'" said Mr. Hopkins, "and although not half so good a player as either of the others, I drove clear over the pond. Why? They prepared for failure. I prepared for success. They got what they prepared for. So did I. It is the same way in business. If you prepare for poor business and failure, you are likely to experience them. If you prepare for good business and success, and go after them with all the confidence and energy you can muster, you are likely to reap them."

We believe it. There are never any duds in THE POPULAR. No "floaters" in the way of stories. Everything is the best that money will buy. We expect to land with every story in every issue.

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GRAHAM CRACKERS
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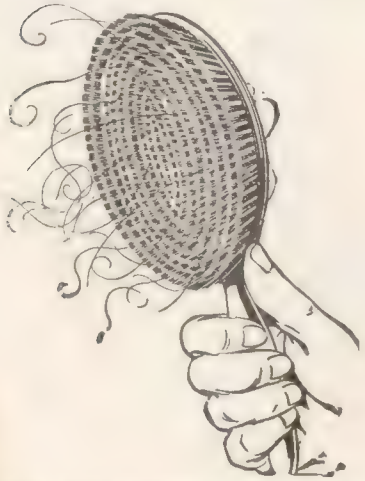

A few cents buys "Danderine." After an application of "Danderine" you can not find a fallen hair or any dandruff, besides every hair shows new life, vigor, brightness, more color and thickness.

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USALYTE makes every gas-jet a furnace. It gives you heat where and when you want it. It uses no heat where you don't need it.

USALYTE, the heating marvel, will keep you warm on the coldest Winter day—at a negligible cost.

The coal it saves will pay for it a dozen times over the first season you use it. It is almost everlasting, safe, and free from carbon.

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Take no inferior substitute.

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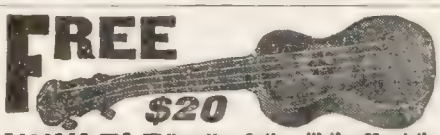

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- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
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- ☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ Ship Draftsman
- ☐ ARCHITECT
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
- ☐ CHEMIST
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ SALESMANSHIP
- ☐ ADVERTISING
- ☐ Window Trimmer
- ☐ Show Card Writer
- ☐ Sign Painter
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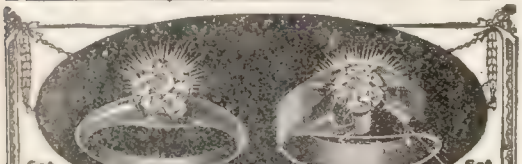
Skin Tortured Babies Sleep

Mothers Rest After Cuticura

Soap, Ointment, Talcum, 25c. everywhere. For samples address: Cuticura Laboratories, Dept. D, Malden, Mass.



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DON'T send a penny. Just say: "Send me a Lachnite mounted in a solid gold ring on 10 day's free trial." We will mail it prepaid right to your home. When it comes merely deposit $4.75 with the postman and wear the ring for 10 full days. **If you, or any of your friends can tell it from a diamond, send it back** and we will return your deposit. But if you decide to buy it—send us $2.50 a month until $18.75 has been paid.

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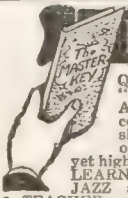

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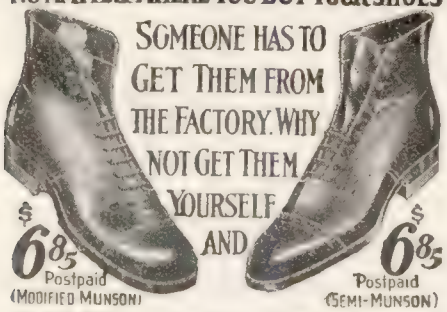
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$6.85 Postpaid (MODIFIED MUNSON)
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SAVE JOBBERS, RETAILERS *and* STORES, COSTS *and* PROFITS

The Army adopted the Munson last for its effect on the wearer. Our "MODIFIED MUNSON" shoes combine comfort and style and are particularly suited for the man who is on his feet continually.

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is to the ears what glasses are to the eyes. **Write for Free Booklet** containing testimonials of users all over the country. It describes causes of deafness; tells how and why the MORLEY PHONE affords relief. Over one hundred thousand sold.

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And you will not be satisfied unless you earn steady promotion. But are you prepared for the job ahead of you? Do you measure up to the standard that insures success? For a more responsible position a fairly good education is necessary. To write a sensible business letter, to prepare estimates, to figure cost and to compute interest, you must have a certain amount of preparation. All this you must be able to do before you will earn promotion.

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We have a plan whereby you can. We can give you a complete but simplified high school course in two years, giving you all the essentials that form the foundation of practical business. It will prepare you to hold your own where competition is keen and exacting. Do not doubt your ability, but make up your mind to it and you will soon have the requirements that will bring you success and big money. YOU CAN DO IT.

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.....Civil Engineer. $5,000 to $15,000	.....Steam Engineer. $2,000 to $4,000
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.....Business Manager. $5,000 to $15,000	.....Photoplay Writer. $2,000 to $10,000
.....Certified Public Accountant $7,000 to $15,000	.....Sanitary Engineer. $2,000 to $5,000
.....Accountant and Auditor. $2,500 to $7,000	.....Telephone Engineer. $2,500 to $5,000
.....Draftsman and Designer. $2 500 to $4,000	.....Telegraph Engineer. $2,500 to $5,000
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Take Tablets without Fear if you see the "Bayer Cross"

For Headache
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Insist upon a "Bayer package," which contains safe, proper Directions. Proved safe by millions.

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"Bayer" introduced Aspirin to physicians 20 years ago.

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35c at your druggist's

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Regulate your digestion so you can eat favorite foods without fear of

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A few tablets of Pape's Diapepsin correct acidity, thus regulating the stomach and giving almost instant relief. Large 60c case—drugstores.

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Club Feet Corrected

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"We cannot begin to tell you how delighted we were to see Garland's feet so nice and straight when he came home and to see him looking so well. We can never thank you enough for giving him straight useful feet in place of the badly clubbed feet that he had when he came to your place."

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The McLain Sanitarium is a thoroughly equipped private institution devoted exclusively to the treatment of Club Feet, Infantile Paralysis, Spinal Diseases and Deformities, Hip Disease, Wry Neck, etc., especially as found in children and young adults. Our book, "Deformities and Paralysis"; also "Book of References," free. Write for them.

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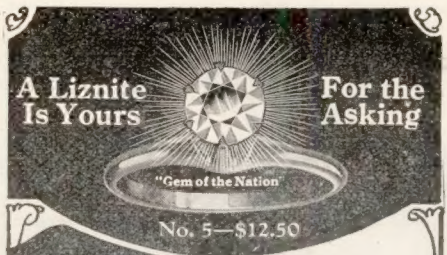
Write for Free Samples



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You've wanted a diamond—a clear, fire-bright, sparkling gem—one that you would prize and that your friends would admire and envy. But with the coming of the LIZNITE you need wait no longer.

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Neither you nor your friends can tell a LIZNITE from a splendid high priced diamond, and the exquisite, hand made, SOLID GOLD mountings on all LIZNITE GEM RINGS surpass anything you have ever before seen or read about.

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Finger Size—Draw strip of paper tightly around second joint of the finger. Send this measurement.

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MAIL THIS COUPON TODAY
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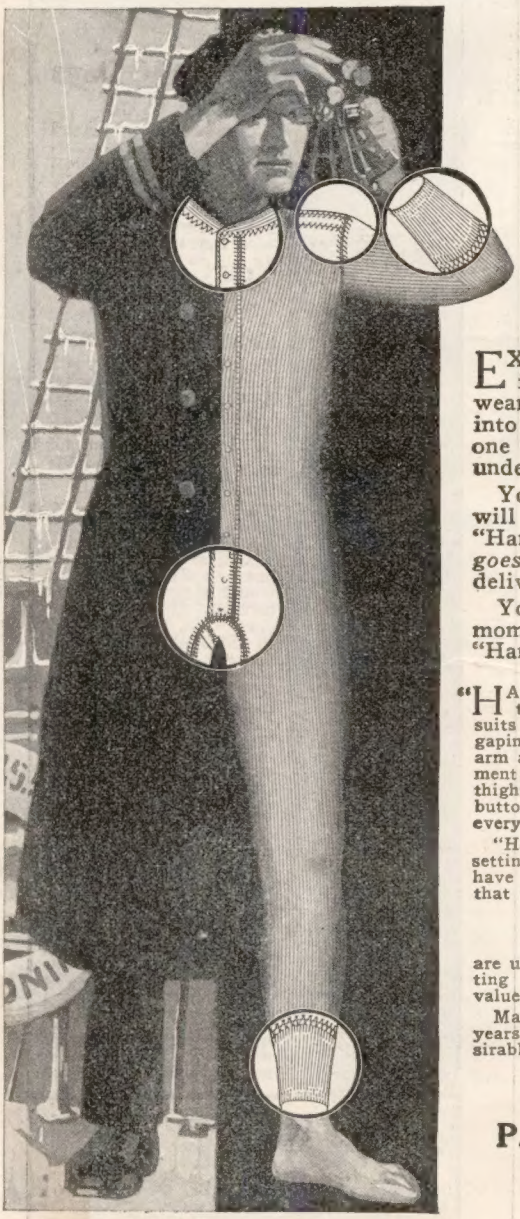
Kindly send me prepaid on your 10-DAY FREE INSPECTION PLAN Ring No. ..... When ring arrives I agree to pay $4.50 and after 10 days either return the ring or forward $3.00 monthly until balance is paid. In case I return the ring you will refund the $4.50 at once. My finger size is.....

Name .....

Address .....

"HANES" is nationally standard underwear—*It will make good to you!*



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UNDERWEAR

Read Hanes Guarantee:

"We guarantee Hanes Underwear absolutely—every thread, stitch and button. We guarantee to return your money or give you a new garment if any seam breaks."

EXTRA wear, extra warmth and extra comfort are built into "Hanes" winter underwear for men just as accurate time is built into a good watch! "Hanes" is made with one idea in mind — that it be the greatest underwear value ever sold at the price!

Your own test will prove that it is—and it will also prove why our guarantee on every "Hanes" garment is so broad. We know what *goes into* "Hanes"—and what "Hanes" must deliver to you in satisfaction!

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"HANES" heavy winter union suits and the new silk trimmed, full combed yarn medium weight union suits (carrying the yellow Hanes label) have the non-gaping tailored collarette and elastic knit, shape holding arm and leg cuffs; buttonholes last the life of the garment; an extra gusset assures extra comfort across the thighs; the "Hanes" closed crotch *stays closed;* pearl buttons sewed on to stay; reinforcements strengthen every strain point.

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are unequalled at the price for fleecy warmth, form fitting comfort and wear-service. They are wonderful value because they give such extraordinary service!

Made in sizes 20 to 34, covering ages from 2 to 16 years. 2 to 4 year old sizes have drop seat. Four desirable colors.

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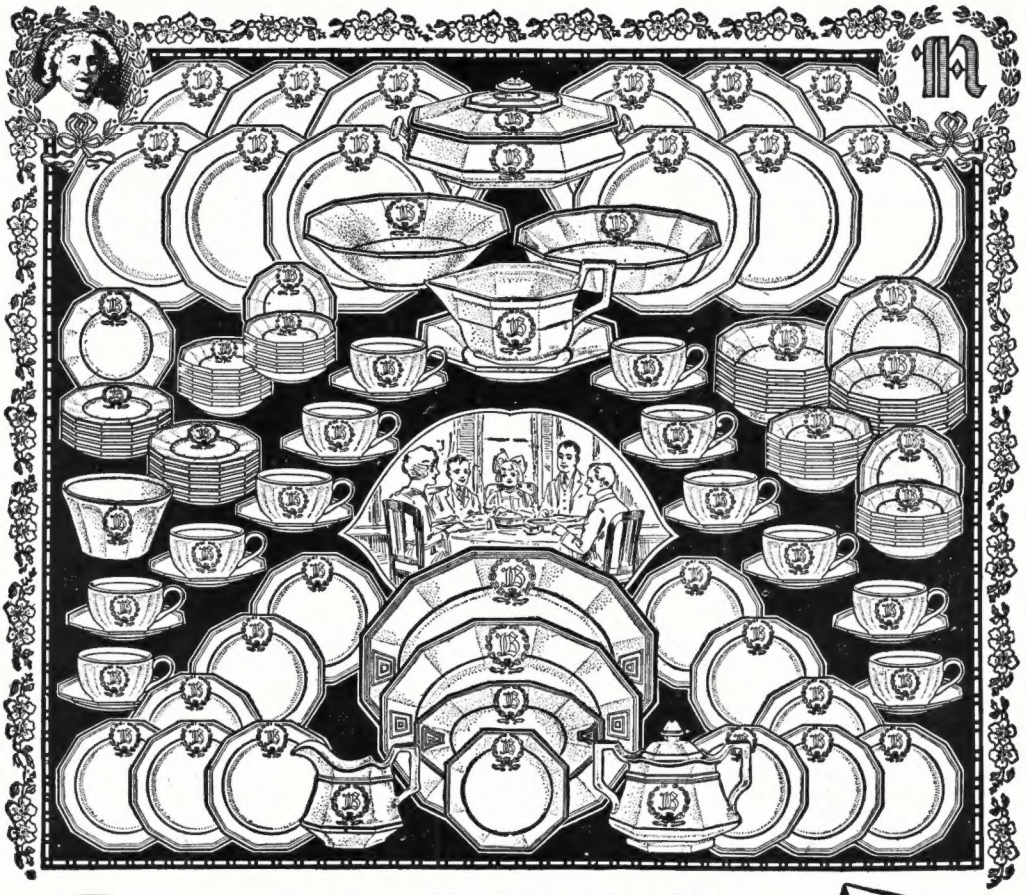
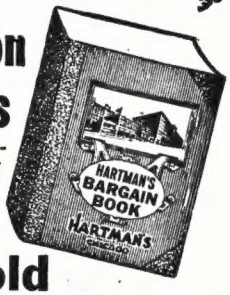
Next Summer—You'll want to wear Hanes Nainsook Union Suits!



$1 Down—Golden Martha Washington Dinner Set—110 Wonderful Pieces



How can we hope to give you even a faint idea of the exquisite beauty of this wonderful Golden Martha Washington Dinner Set? A picture can't do it because no picture can show the gleam of heavy, lustrous gold comprising the heavy decoration, or the snowy whiteness of each piece where it glistens through the heavy bands of rich gold and the wreath with your initial monogram also in gold You must see the distinctive shape—the many and varied artistic indentations—which make this pattern so different from all others. It is a reproduction of the most expensive dinner set made.

With Your Initial Monogram In Gold

Send only $1.00 now. Compare with the most luxurious tableware you have ever seen. If not satisfied return the set in 30 days and we will return your $1.00 and pay transportation both ways. If you keep them, pay balance in easy monthly payments as stated below. Each piece is fire glazed—guaranteed not to check or craze. **Order by No. 327CMA19. Price of complete set of 110 pieces, $35.95. Send only $1.00 with coupon, balance $3.00 per month.**

Complete Set Consists of

12 dinner plates, 9 in.; 12 breakfast plates, 7 in.; 12 soup plates, 7⅞ in.; 12 cups; 12 saucers; 12 cereal dishes, 6 in.; 12 individual bread and butter plates, 6¼ in.; 12 sauce dishes; 1 platter, 13½ in.; 1 platter, 11¾ in.; 1 celery dish, 8¾ in.; 1 sauce boat tray, 7¾ in.; 1 butter plate, 6 in.; 1 vegetable dish, 10½ in., with lid (2 pieces); 1 deep bowl, 8¾ in.; 1 shallow bowl, 9 in.; 1 small deep bowl, 5 in.; 1 gravy boat, 7¾ in.; 1 creamer; 1 sugar bowl with cover (2 pieces). Shipped from Chicago warehouse. Shipping weight about 90 pounds.

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3913 Wentworth Ave., Dept. 2980 Chicago

Actual Size of Initial

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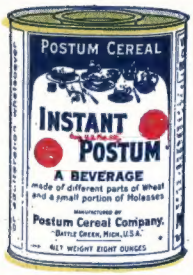
I enclose $1.00. Send 110-piece Golden Martha Washington Dinner Set Number 327CMA19. I am to have 30 days' trial. If not satisfied will ship it back and you will refund my $1.00 and pay transportation both ways. If I keep it I will pay $3.00 per month until price, $35.95, is paid.

Name .....

Address .....

Occupation ..... Give Initial ..... Wanted—*Any One Letter*



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